



TOTEMS

NEWSLETTER

SEMESTER 1 2025 EDITION

FROM THE TORRES STRAIT TO THE FRONTLINE

For 23-year-old Margarita Abednego-Muhamad, the dream of becoming a police officer is one step closer to reality.

From Thursday Island (Waiben), Margarita is one of 12 graduates of the **First Nations Pathways to Policing Program**, a course delivered at TAFE Queensland's **Cairns campus** in collaboration with Queensland Police Service (QPS), Australian Border Force (ABF), and the Australian Federal Police (AFP).

The program is designed to prepare First Nations students for a career in law enforcement, developing skills in conflict resolution, teamwork, digital literacy, and critical thinking.

For Margarita, the journey has been about more than just training – it's about changing perceptions.

"Growing up, law enforcement wasn't always seen in a positive way," she said. "But joining this program and seeing what it's really like

has changed my perspective. I want to be part of that change and show my community that policing is about helping people."

The course gave Margarita firsthand experience of life on the frontline, including a visit to the Townsville Police

Academy, where she trained alongside police recruits and toured different stations.

"Going to the Academy was a big eye-opener," she said. "We got to see how everything works, sit in on classes, and even try some of the physical training. It made me even more excited to join."

Margarita's TAFE Queensland teacher, Janus Gronvald, said the program is about building confidence and creating pathways.

"This group of students has been amazing to teach," Mr Gronvald said. "Margarita and her classmates have grown so much. They've worked hard, stepped out of their comfort zones, and embraced every challenge. They're ready for the next step."

The program also focuses on culture and identity, ensuring students feel strong in who they are as they step into law enforcement roles.

Continues on page 2



*Margarita
Abednego-Muhamad*

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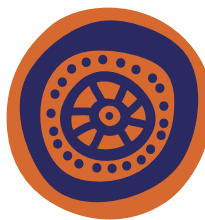
"We had guest speakers come in from QPS, AFP, and ABF, including First Nations officers, which was really inspiring," Margarita said. "It showed us that there are opportunities out there for us."

With her **Certificate III in Vocational and Study Pathways for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People** (11036NAT) now complete, Margarita

is preparing to take the QPS entrance assessment and hopes to join the Service's dedicated First Nations intake in October.

For Margarita, the motivation is simple – she wants to help people.

"I just want to create a better environment for the next generation,"



she said. "This program has given me the skills and confidence to do that."

Her advice to others thinking about joining the program?

"Just do it," she said. "You won't regret it." 🌀



First Nations Pathways to Policing Program graduation

YARNING FOR GROWTH



Yarning for Growth is a mentoring program for First Nations students, led by First Nations educators and students.

In 2025, the first group of students from across Queensland are connecting with mentors who are committed to providing support to increase confidence, academic performance, and support cultural identity.

"Through personalised guidance, academic support, and cultural education, the program aims to enhance students' confidence, academic performance, and sense of identity," TAFE Queensland's Centre for First Nations Training Manager Jeanie McIntosh said.

"The program will provide an encouraging and supportive environment for the students to help them thrive both personally and within their communities.

"We are proud to be able to offer the program that promises to be a transformative experience for both the mentors and the mentees."

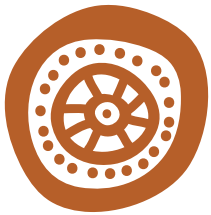
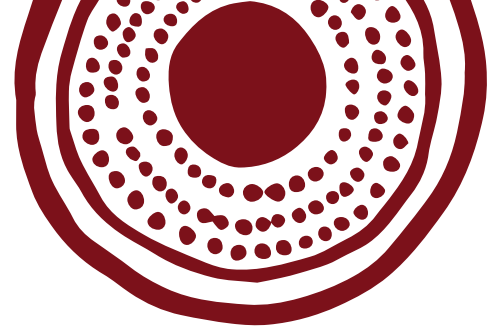
The Yarning for Growth program is an initiative included in TAFE Queensland's First Nations Education Strategy, and supported by the organisation's Reconciliation Action Plan working group.

Mentors are encouraged to complete a Peer Mentoring module before being matched with eligible students. 🌀



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Scan the QR code to learn more about Yarning for Growth

LUCINDAH HEALS TO HELP OTHERS



For Lucindah Currie, studying nursing isn't just about a career – it's about giving back to community and improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and families.

A proud Koori woman from Gundungurra Country, Lucindah began her career working with the Institute of Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) in Brisbane – first as a Family Support Practitioner, then as a Project Officer.

"I'm a Koori girl from Gundungurra Country, which spans the Southern Highlands, Mittagong, Goulburn, and the Blue Mountains," she said.

"I was born in Goulburn, at the southernmost part of the region, and growing up on Country, I gradually made my way up to the top of the Blue Mountains."

Lucindah's connection to IUIH is deeply personal. She accessed their birthing program when she was pregnant – an experience that shaped her future.

"I had a traumatic pregnancy and birth, but my midwife was just so wonderful," she said.

"The support I received made me realise that I want to help other women through their journeys."

Lucindah experienced hyperemesis gravidarum (HG), a severe pregnancy condition that causes nausea, vomiting and weight loss.

"I lost 24 kilos during my pregnancy and spent so much time in hospital," she said.

Inspired by the care she received, Lucindah made the decision to become a midwife. When a nurse practitioner at work suggested TAFE Queensland, she jumped at the chance to take the next step.

"All the midwives at work told me to go for it – they wished they had taken this pathway because you can work while you study," she said.

Lucindah is now studying the **Diploma of Nursing (HLT54121)** at TAFE Queensland's **South Bank campus**. Balancing study, work, and motherhood hasn't been easy – but she's found strong support.

"The way the course is delivered is perfect for me. I struggled with online study in the past, but face-to-face learning at the South Bank campus with supportive teachers has made all the difference."

She said having teachers who still work in the industry brings lessons to life.

"They bring real-life examples into the classroom – it's exciting to hear what we'll do in our future careers."

She also credits Indigenous Student Support Officer, Morgan Cotter, for her encouragement.

"The Indigenous Learning Centre has been a quiet space where I can focus, and Morgan has been amazing. She checks in on me, helps with study questions, and reassures me when things feel overwhelming."

Lucindah's ultimate goal is to become a midwife and focus on providing Indigenous maternity care for women in remote parts of Australia. She's especially passionate about raising awareness of HG.

"HG affects one per cent of pregnant women, and then 20 per cent of them will have it for their entire pregnancy – which is what I had," she said.

"It's rare, but it still affects

hundreds of thousands of pregnancies every year, and there's a high suicide rate associated with it."

"Fortunately, I was in an urban area, so I had access to a hospital but women in remote parts of the country don't always get the required level of care."

"Because of HG, my baby stopped growing at 27 weeks, so I was induced early and had an emergency C-section under general anaesthetic. Waking up and having to wait an hour to see her was extremely traumatic," she said.

"The whole journey – from conception to birth and beyond – was an ordeal. Having been through it myself, I want to support pregnant women in Indigenous communities to have healthy pregnancies while raising awareness about the physical and mental health risks of HG."

"Thanks to my training and support, I'm getting closer to my dream every day, and I'm excited for what's ahead," Lucindah concluded. 🌀



Lucindah Currie



NEW DIGITAL HUB BRINGS JOBS TO YARRABAH COMMUNITY

Sixteen proud Yarrabah community members have successfully graduated from a pre-employment program, designed to prepare them for roles at the new Yarrabah Digital Service Centre.

Yarrabah, located 60km southeast of Cairns on the traditional lands of the Gunggandji and Yidinji people, is Australia's largest discrete Aboriginal community.

It is now home to the fourth digital service hub of its kind in remote Aboriginal communities, following the successes of similar hubs in Cherbourg, Jumbun, and Palm Island.

The Yarrabah Digital Service Centre is fully community-owned and operated, providing ongoing employment for local community members in digital roles.

Wugu Nyambil – the employer of the new graduates – will help these new recruits serve a variety of clients, including Queensland Shared Services, DB Results, and HRS.

The new centre not only creates jobs but supports the wider community by fostering long-term economic independence and skill development.

The training program mirrors a real-world work environment, easing participants into a full work-week by starting with three days of training per week and progressing to five days by the end of the course.

After the initial eight-week training, graduates transition directly into their new roles and will continue to study with TAFE Queensland on the job, working toward a **Certificate III in Business** (BSB30120).



Yarrabah Digital Service Centre program graduates



L-R: Rachelle Fourmile, Colin Costello, Gail Ambrym, Vivian Miller and Patrice Dabah

TAFE Queensland North region Director of Educational Delivery, Jane McKellar, praised the partnership model for the Yarrabah Innovation and Digital Hub.

"Programs like this hub showcase the power of community-focused, on Country employment opportunities," Ms McKellar said.

"Our approach centres on two-way learning, where teachers, students, and community members grow together. By considering the learners, the community, and the goals of each participant, we create a truly impactful experience that builds skills and leads to real employment and sustainable, long-term outcomes."

During the initial part of the training, participants completed two weeks of soft skills training. This focused on

essential workplace skills, including communication, teamwork, and customer service.

Breannen Sands, 24, joined the program to improve her skills and achieve new goals.

Reflecting on her journey, she said, "I've learned so much, from numeracy to Microsoft skills, and working with my teammates has been my favourite part."

"The centre brings more jobs to Yarrabah, and I'd tell anyone thinking about joining you'll learn as you go. No one's perfect, but you grow along the way," Ms Sands added.

Colin Costello, 42, who initially joined to take on a new challenge, echoed this sentiment.

"I wanted to start at the grassroots level and learn something different, and this program gave me a great refresher in top-level and basic skills," he said.

"Seeing the other participants – each with a unique way of thinking – and learning from them was the highlight for me. There's limited employment here, but this centre is opening doors and will create so much growth for Yarrabah, especially for our younger generation."

Beyond immediate employment, the Yarrabah Digital Service Centre is a lasting investment in the community.

The Yarrabah Digital Service Centre was made possible through a collaboration among the Queensland Government, Wugu Nyambil, TAFE Queensland, HRS and DB Results.

MEET JODI – HERE TO SUPPORT YOU ON YOUR STUDY JOURNEY

Jodi Archer is one of the Indigenous Student Support Officers at TAFE Queensland's Cairns campus, and she's here to make sure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feel welcome, supported, and connected during their studies.

Jodi's roots run deep in Far North Queensland. "My dad is Djungan from Mount Mulligan in the Dimbulah area, and my mum is Kuku Yalanji," she said.

"I'm proud of where I come from and love supporting mob to achieve their goals."

Jodi's role is wide-ranging – she helps with enrolments, liaises between students and teachers, and connects students with the **right support** if things get tough.

That might mean linking students with tutoring, housing assistance, medical services, counselling, or even helping them write job references.

"It's more than just signing up for a course," Jodi said. "We're here to walk alongside students through the highs and lows, whether they're living locally or travelling in for block training."

She's especially passionate about making students feel comfortable on campus.

"We want our students to feel seen and heard. If they've got any issues, I'm here for a yarn – and if I can't help, I'll point them to someone who can."



Jodi Archer

Jodi says she finds it rewarding to watch students grow in confidence. "You see some students come in quiet, unsure – and by the end of the course, they've opened up and are exploring different career pathways. It's great to be part of that journey."

Students can contact Jodi through **Client Services (H Block)** at the **Cairns campus**, call **1300 308 233**, or just pop in.

"We're always happy to chat. You don't need an appointment – just drop by."

For Jodi, it's simple. "We're here to help mob succeed." 🌀



Scan the QR code for more information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

BUILDING FUTURES ON PALM ISLAND ONE CAREER AT A TIME

For Palm Island (Bwgcolman) community member Yvette Nicholas, the journey from trainee to Team Leader at the Palm Island Digital Service Centre has been life changing.

Employed by the Palm Island Community Company and working for Telstra, Yvette has embraced the program's training and employment opportunities, empowering her to support her community and build a meaningful career.

"My experience, starting with a 12-week training course at TAFE Queensland's **Palm Island campus**, has been absolutely wonderful," Yvette said.

"The most encouraging educators pushed me to my limits to achieve everything possible. The group I started with also helped me grow in so many ways."

The program, delivered in partnership with TAFE Queensland and Palm Island Community Company, provides participants with the skills needed for employment in Telstra's Digital Service Centre.

Training begins with two weeks of soft skills development, supported by **Back to Work Jobseeker Officers**, focusing on communication, customer service, and teamwork.

Participants then transition to industry-specific training in digital skills and call centre operations, before commencing their traineeship and working toward a **Certificate III in Business** (BSB30120) while on the job.

Stepping into the Team Leader role at the Palm Island Digital Service Centre has been a significant achievement for Yvette.

"Becoming a Team Leader was not something I was expecting," Yvette said.

"This role has brought so much new knowledge to me, and I'm loving every moment of it. Helping my workmates and expressing my own knowledge toward my team has been one of the most fulfilling parts of this journey."

As a Team Leader, Yvette supports her colleagues while engaging with Telstra peers and management to deliver outstanding service. Her role shows the program's ability to not only create employment opportunities but also empower participants to develop leadership skills and grow within the organisation.

Reflecting on her journey, Yvette shared how the program helped her overcome challenges and embrace new opportunities.

"I was nervous stepping out of my comfort zone and taking on calls, but once I got the hang of it, I loved every moment of engaging with different people and hearing their stories," Yvette said.



L-R: Frances Doyle, Yvette Nicholas, Sunshine Smith, Perry Thompson

“The group I started with also helped me grow in so many ways.”



Yvette Nicholas

“The support I’ve received has been incredible, and seeing the positive outcomes for customers and my community brings me so much happiness.”

The program’s impact extends beyond Yvette’s personal growth, creating a ripple effect throughout the Palm Island community.

“It’s a positive impact for our community. Having the largest Australian mobile network industry on Palm Island has brought more jobs for locals and created career pathways for young people,” Yvette said.

Senior Teacher at TAFE Queensland, Janus Gronvald, applauded Yvette’s achievements.

“Seeing participants like Yvette grow in confidence and skill is why this program exists,” Mr. Gronvald said.

“Her journey from student to Team Leader reflects her incredible commitment and the support of this community-focused training model.”

The Palm Island Digital Service Centre has been recognised for its outstanding contribution to training and job creation, winning the Premier’s Industry Collaboration Award at the 2024 **Queensland Training Awards** and securing silver at the 2024 **Australian Training Awards**.

The Palm Island Digital Service Centre was made possible through a collaboration among the Queensland Government, Telstra, Palm Island Community Company, Rainbow Gateway Ltd., Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council, Back to Work, TAFE Queensland, Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) Program, and MEGT Australia. 



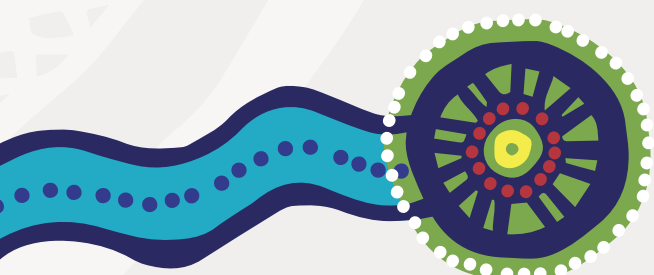
Scan the QR code to watch how this exciting initiative came to life.



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LEAH-ROSE'S JOURNEY IN YOUTH WORK

Leah-Rose Hart, a proud Indigenous woman with connections to the Gundungurra and Darug peoples of Katoomba in the Blue Mountains, is following her passion to support the next generation.

Now based in Queensland, Leah-Rose is studying the **Certificate IV in Youth Work (CHC40421)** at TAFE Queensland's **Springfield campus** – with plans to help young people in her community who are doing it tough.

"I've always had a passion to work with others in need, and as I've gotten older, I've noticed that the need for helping troubled youth has grown too," Leah-Rose said.

"I want to be able to support them, grow their vision, and also help them to grow into the best version of themselves."

Leah-Rose moved from New South Wales with her family in 2019 and is the first in her immediate family to study with TAFE Queensland.

"I've actually really enjoyed learning how to help troubled youth work through their struggles to become a better person," Leah-Rose shared.

"I've also really enjoyed doing the mental health side of things – I've been able to relate in many ways. Mental health is such a big issue in our youth community," she said.

Leah-Rose studies one day a week on campus and regularly accesses support through the Springfield campus **Learning Support** team.

"I know that they – the learning support staff – are committed to

each and every student, their abilities, and meeting their needs so that they can learn in a way best suitable for them," Leah-Rose shared.



Leah-Rose Hart

"I honestly would not have been able to get through without three amazing team members in the student support team that I have met doing this course. I would highly recommend tapping into help from a support coach, because of how much they have helped me."

Leah-Rose regularly works with support coach Lisa Adams, who provides individualised assistance with assessments, Connect and computer support, proofreading, printed materials and one-on-one guidance when things feel overwhelming.

"Here, the teachers, my learning support person Lisa and the student

“I want to be able to support them, grow their vision, and also help them to grow into the best version of themselves.”


services team – I feel like my voice is heard – and that's amazing," she said.

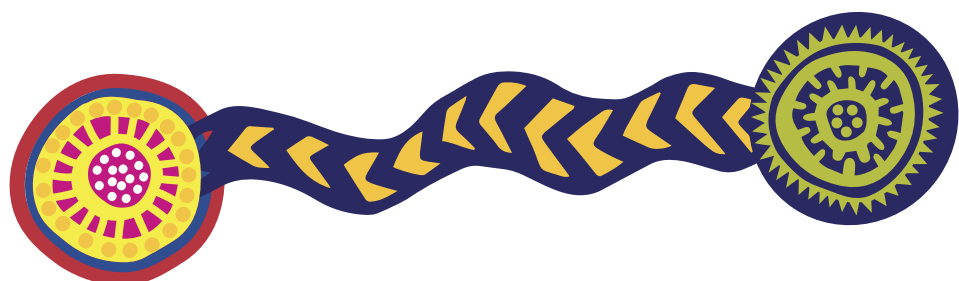
With plans to graduate soon, Leah-Rose already has her sights set on what's next.

"I actually want to come back and do further study. Once I finish doing youth work, I want to come back and look at doing something around mental health counselling, to get into a further field, to be able to provide the best for the next generation," Leah-Rose said.

To others who may be feeling unsure about studying, Leah-Rose offers some solid advice.

"My advice to others would be, if you're unsure while studying at TAFE Queensland, or are about to study at TAFE, speak to people who are in the careers you want to pursue, or speak to the career counsellors at TAFE Queensland, because they know their stuff."

"And never be afraid to ask for additional support because they truly live up to their high standard of training," Leah-Rose concluded. 



CONNECTION OPENS PATHWAYS FOR SCHOOL STUDENTS

TAFE Queensland connects with schools all over the state to open career pathways for students nearing the end of their schooling, and The Murri School in Acacia Ridge is no different.

With 280 students from Prep to Year 12, The Murri School is a community owned and controlled Independent School which sits on the unceded lands of the Yagara people in Acacia Ridge, Queensland

The Murri School recently connected with TAFE Queensland to offer a broader range of vocational pathways for its students through studying **TAFE at School Trade Tasters in Year 10** and **pre-apprenticeship qualifications in Years 11 and 12**, and in 2024 has seen its largest cohort of TAFE at School students yet.


VET Coordinator at The Murri School, Samantha Daragnes, said students are enjoying their training at the local TAFE Queensland campus a few streets from school and are all on track to complete their pre-apprenticeship qualifications.

"Our students all do their trade courses through TAFE at School at the **Acacia Ridge campus**, and they go to do their training one day per week during the term," Ms Daragnes said.

"We have students training in plumbing, furniture making, and automotive certificates, and we also have one in the Trade Taster program for Year 10."

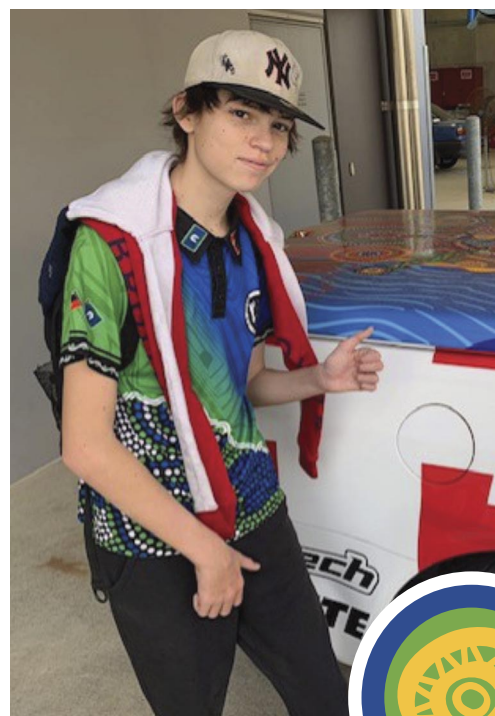
"We're not a large cohort, but all of our TAFE at School students are engaged and enjoying their training, none have dropped out of their courses, and they are all on track to complete these qualifications," she said.

Like many schools across the state, The Murri School prioritises its students completing Year 12 but offers TAFE at School pathways as an opportunity to build vocational skills and prepare for a career at the same time.

Scan the QR code to for more information about TAFE at School training. 



Scan the QR code for more information about TAFE at School training.



SELINA COMBINES CULTURE AND QUALIFICATIONS TO SUPPORT HER COMMUNITY



Selina Combite

Selina Combite is combining her culture, training and passion to make a real difference for families in her community.

Aproud Gamilaroi woman, Selina moved to Brisbane to further her career in the social services sector.

She now works at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service (ATSICHS) in Logan, supporting families through the child safety system.

"I have a passion for child safety issues and wanted a career helping improve outcomes for identified families," Selina explained.

"Child safety doesn't always do a great job with our people, which has been the case since colonisation."

Working as a Family Participation Empowerment Practitioner, Selina was supported by ATSICHS to study a **Diploma of Child, Youth and Family Intervention (CHC50321)** through TAFE Queensland.

The opportunity arose when ATSICHS began offering its staff access to

diploma-level qualifications to enhance their skills through a partnership with TAFE Queensland.

This partnership saw TAFE Queensland teachers work with ATSICHS staff, sharing knowledge and practical skills they can use to continue to raise the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the wider Brisbane and Logan communities.

Delivered in ATSICHS training rooms at their Bullang Bujerim site in Logan, TAFE Queensland community services teacher Deb Stephens brought decades of industry experience and cultural sensitivity to each session.

"Deb would visit us once a week to train, and I loved it – it was so good," Selina said.

"She was motivating, inspiring, and genuinely excited when we achieved each goal. Having her cheer us on made all the difference."

Selina said the training helped her build practical skills she uses every day, while also boosting her self-confidence.

"Just 12 months ago, my manager introduced me to the concept of imposter syndrome, and I was like 'that is me'. But now, that's completely gone," she said.

"Thanks to this course, I have more confidence in the workplace and myself."

"Each day, I use the skills and strategies I learned to uncover the needs of identified children and families, get their point of view, understand what is happening in their world, and make a plan for their household," she said.

"I then take that plan back to child safety, who come for a home visit, and we have those conversations. I help by giving families a voice to stand up and say, 'This is what we're doing for our family.'"

"Having a cultural connection is great for helping identified children and families, and linking my skills, knowledge, and passion to help them is so satisfying."

Selina now has her sights set on specialising in domestic violence prevention.

"There are not enough domestic violence prevention practitioners equipped to do meaningful work with families experiencing domestic violence."

Grateful for the support of her teacher and employer, Selina said the training has helped her formalise her passion for helping others into a fulfilling career.

"The combination of my training, my culture, my work experience and my passion has set me up for a fulfilling career," she concluded. 🌟



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service Diploma of Child, Youth and Family Intervention (CHC50321) graduates

Official Vocational Education and Training (VET) partner of the North Queensland Toyota Cowboys





TAFE Queensland acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and respect the continuing connection to land, waters, cultures and family that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples uphold.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future. We recognise that teaching and learning has taken place on Country for over 60,000 years and two-way learning is an important part of our reconciliation journey.

Information is correct at time of printing, May 2025. For the most up-to-date information refer to our website at tafeqld.edu.au.

In many areas of Australia it is considered offensive to publish photographs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are deceased. Readers are warned that this publication may inadvertently contain such photographs.

Artwork elements from TAFE Queensland's Reconciliation Action Plan artwork 'Connecting Knowledge – Connecting Cultures' by Riki Salam, We are 27 Creative. Visit tafeqld.edu.au/rap to view the Reconciliation Action Plan.

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