

## INDIGENOUS SUCCESS PODCAST WITH CHRIS MILLER

### **Voiceover**

Welcome to “Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, being it”, with Dr Katelyn Barney and Professor Tracey Bunda.

### **Dr Barney**

Hi everyone, I’m Katelyn, and welcome to our podcast series, “Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, being it”. I’d like to start the podcast by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands where we’re recording this today, and pay my respects to their ancestors and their descendants who continue to have strong spiritual and cultural connections to Country. I’d also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where you’re listening from today and pay my respects to them.

The podcast series focuses on what works in outreach programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students. This series is part of a suite of resources developed from an Equity Fellowship that I undertook in 2020 funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. It focuses on success factors that are based on key findings from the Fellowship. Each episode is an interview with an Indigenous staff member or student about aspects of effective outreach programs. I’m a non-Indigenous woman born and raised on Jagera and Turrbal Country and I’m joined by my co-host and colleague, Professor Tracey Bunda who is part of the advisory group on the Fellowship.

### **Dr Bunda**

Hello everybody. I too would like to acknowledge traditional owners of Country, wherever you may be listening. I’m a Ngugi/Wakka Wakka woman and currently the acting Director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies unit at the University of Queensland. Katelyn and I decided to call the podcast series, “Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, being it” because there are multiple understandings of “success” in this context – what are the influences on our lives that lead to success, what are those life experiences that help us to be successful? Does location or context play a part, and what are the cultural matters that help inform success? Also, you’ll hear Katelyn and I use the terms “Aboriginal” and “Torres Strait Islander”, “Indigenous”, “First Nations” in this podcast and we want to acknowledge this and note we are aware of the diversity and different perspectives on the use of these terms.

### **Dr Barney**

We hope that the podcast series is useful for outreach practitioners working with Indigenous students, but we also hope the podcast is useful for anyone with an interest in student equity and student success in higher education more generally.

Our guest today is Chris Miller who is Indigenous Engagement Project Officer at Western Sydney University, and we’re really keen to hear about how outreach staff can weave cultural aspects into outreach programs, particularly for Years 7 to 9, so welcome, Chris.

### **Chris Miller**

Pleasure to be here.

**Dr Bunda**

Chris, would you mind to introduce yourself in whatever way you are comfortable?

**Chris Miller**

Hi everyone. My name is Chris Miller. I'm a Wiradjuri man, currently living on Darug Country out in the Hawkesbury region. My family comes from a little town called Trangie just outside of Dubbo, and my father went through the different homes and has moved out this way towards Western Sydney. I've spent my whole life in Western Sydney; yeah, very honoured to live on these lands.

**Dr Barney**

Thanks, Chris. Chris, can you tell us a bit about your role at the university?

**Chris Miller**

My job is primarily in the Pathways to Dreaming Program that we have here at Western Sydney University, so, a lot of the work we do is with secondary schools – secondary Indigenous students. We work as an aspirations program; a lot of the work I do is mentoring in schools with our students and our young people, and then working with a lot of teachers as well in supporting those students.

**Dr Barney**

One of the findings from the Fellowship is that most outreach programs for Indigenous students are in Years 10 to 12 but the earlier engagement with students in early years of high school is a really key time to develop age and stage appropriate outreach to these student, and Professor Maria Raciti has written about this as well in terms of the timing of outreach programs. Can you tell us a bit about the outreach programs you run for the early years of high school?

**Chris Miller**

The program that I work with works with Years 8 to 12 currently. We have some different components to the delivery of our program, so we do in-school mentoring which is a different workshop in school with each year group, we do online yarning which we've taken up as a really important way to talk about culture with some of the kids in the current Covid-19 climate, and then we also have the on-campus experience days which are a day where each year group will be able to come out and they get to experience what it's like to be on campus at Western – lots of different workshops and also get to meet the people in our Badanami Centre as well for student support.

**Dr Bunda**

The importance of cultural aspects of the campus, Chris, which you just touched on, was a theme that came through in interviews with students and staff during the Fellowship that Katelyn has undertaken. Can you tell us a little bit more about those cultural aspects included in the programs that you have for the students that you bring on campus?

**Chris Miller**

We try to embed culture in everything we do as much as we can in our team. For our campus experience days for example, we will try and run different workshops with different cultural providers in the local area. For example, we ran a workshop with our Year 8 students which was cultural arts so they got to have a big workshop with one of our local art providers and we kind of incorporate that in with a lot of the other, more academic workshops and subject

interest workshops that we run. That's something that we try to do at every on-campus experience day, but not just at our on-campus experience days – our online yarnning sessions that we run, they're all about embedding culture and looking at different aspects of culture that we have, as well as some of the mentoring workshops that we do as well.

### **Dr Bunda**

What about with Covid and the shift to online have outreach activities? How do you include these cultural elements in the online space? You were talking about the mentoring program for example.

### **Chris Miller**

It's definitely not without its challenges. One of the things that we really try to do is – particularly our online yarnning that has been quite successful – is just to go through broader aspects of culture and try and make it fun. We do have a lot of our little quizzes at the end where students can win prizes for listening in, we cover a pretty broad range of topics, looking at things such as the political rights, freedom rides and that sort of stuff. We also look at, in our mentoring sessions, such as [0:07:18] and give a bit of a broad overview. One of the things that I think is really important is that students still have access to culture and that knowledge as much as possible, and we're hoping that in future we can embed more community in our online activities as well.

### **Dr Barney**

Because Chris, also I think when you've got on-campus activities, you're bringing Elders onto campus as well, so is there a way of doing that in the online space, to have Elders involved?

### **Chris Miller**

Our uni is still, I think, looking at doing... it's something that we're not doing at the moment just with access I think is a really hard thing, especially for our Elders. One thing that we do is we have got some pre-recorded stuff that we work with for Elders like our Welcomes that we have at Western, and we do have some pre-recorded content that we're trying to get up and running on some of our online hubs as some resources but in terms of, I guess, live engagement, it's not something that we've been able to do.

### **Dr Barney**

Yeah, it is, it's tough in the online space. You also have an outreach program, I believe, for primary aged students called "Heartbeat" which I really like the name of. Can you talk a bit about the activities that you do with these younger students, and how do you make sure that they're age and stage appropriate?

### **Chris Miller**

Yes. Heartbeat kind of - doesn't "kind of" - it aligns with our program in the sense that it's all about building aspirations of our young people, and that's something that is consistent across both of our programs. Heartbeat works with Years 3 to 6 across schools in Great Western Sydney, and the whole idea is, you know, it's very much based around raising awareness of health and wellbeing – that's how it all sort of started off. I know that our main project officer for that program has introduced some more cultural activities and aspects into that this year, recently, but the whole idea I guess of the program originally was that it was

getting students to think about careers in health – nursing, midwifery – and start thinking about breaking down the barriers at an early age, to tertiary education.

**Dr Bunda**

Is that operated in school time or post-school time?

**Chris Miller**

Usually it's done in-school. We'll generally have our project officer go out to a school – it might be during class time; sometimes it might be during recess or one of the breaks, and we'll find that they'll get our ambassadors out as well. We do have student ambassadors who are current students here at Western, working with the project officers and the activities and help them coordinate with the students.

**Dr Barney**

What about post-engagement – beyond the programs? That was one of the findings as well of the Fellowship was the importance of continuing that engagement with Indigenous students after the programs finished. How do you ensure post-engagement with students? Before, you know, we've talked and you've mentioned the idea of the 13<sup>th</sup> year, which I thought was interesting.

**Chris Miller**

I think that's something that we definitely don't do enough of and I think that's something that's a big area for us to improve on and develop further. We do work very closely with Badanami who are our Indigenous support services team at Western, and we do often try and steer some of the students towards the opportunities of working with us as a student ambassador, but in terms of following up in a 13<sup>th</sup> year, yeah, it's not something that we've done as much of as we should, I think.

**Dr Bunda**

Chris, the podcast is called, "Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, being it". Can I just ask you what you think "success" means?

**Chris Miller**

"Success" isn't just about the achievement itself; the achievements that our people have are amazing in many aspects, but I think for me, it's about inspiring others. That's something that really drove me to do what I do today and I think we've all been inspired by someone in our lives, no matter which way we've gone in our world. So, I think in terms of me, it's inspiring the next generation to keep pushing forward and to keep doing great things for our communities.

**Dr Barney**

Thanks, Chris, for joining us. It's been really great to talk to you, especially about those programs for early years of high school, and also for primary school which I think is really great as well.

**Chris Miller**

Thank you for having me – appreciate it.

**Dr Bunda**

Katelyn and I both want to thank you for joining this podcast series, “Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, and being it”. If you’ve got any questions about this podcast or any of the other podcasts that you may have listened to, please contact Katelyn on her email address – “k.barney...” – that is B-A-R-N-E-Y – [k.barney@UQ.edu.au](mailto:k.barney@UQ.edu.au). Thank you very much, and we hope that you’ll join us in the future.

[End of recording]