

My Future,
My Culture,
My Way.

NSW Department of Education



Case Study – Dr Jodi Edwards

Who I am?

My name's Jodi. I'm a proud Yuin, Dharawal woman, with Wandandian and Dharawal kinship connection through marriage.

In Year 10 I made the decision to leave school to help support my family financially after my father was injured in an accident at the Steelworks. I had always wanted to be the first in my family to finish the HSC. Leaving in Year 10, I felt like a bit of a failure.

Returning to school

When I left school, I worked for a couple of years in some pretty hard jobs. I was a brickie's labourer. I was a concreter. I was a landscaper. And then I secured an apprenticeship as a pastry cook.

After I finished my apprenticeship I got a job working in the Commonwealth Employment Service doing clerical work, then a scholarship came up to be able to go back to school and do your HSC.

So, at the age of 26, with support from my coach David Vaughan, I was encouraged to return to high school to complete the HSC. I moved to Singleton – where I lived with my coach and his family, as I was also competing in elite sport. I was on the Australian team for weightlifting and powerlifting.

Finishing what you start

I'm all about finishing what you start. And so, for me, not having the HSC meant that I didn't finish school. No one in my family had ever finished school.

Singleton High was in its infancy of Aboriginal education at the time, and so they had an Aboriginal student support program, which offered tutoring. I was able to get some tutoring because I hadn't been at school for 10 years.

The school kids used to say they knew I was older than 18 because I didn't have red Ps on my car. But otherwise they were really supportive.

Finding a career path

Everyone around me worked at the steelworks, including my mum who had to work night shifts, so it was never something I wanted for myself.

I had a couple of dreams as a kid but predominantly I wanted to play sport. I had a cousin who was a chef in the Navy, and I thought at one stage that that's what I would like to do. But I was too short, so I didn't make the height requirements to go.

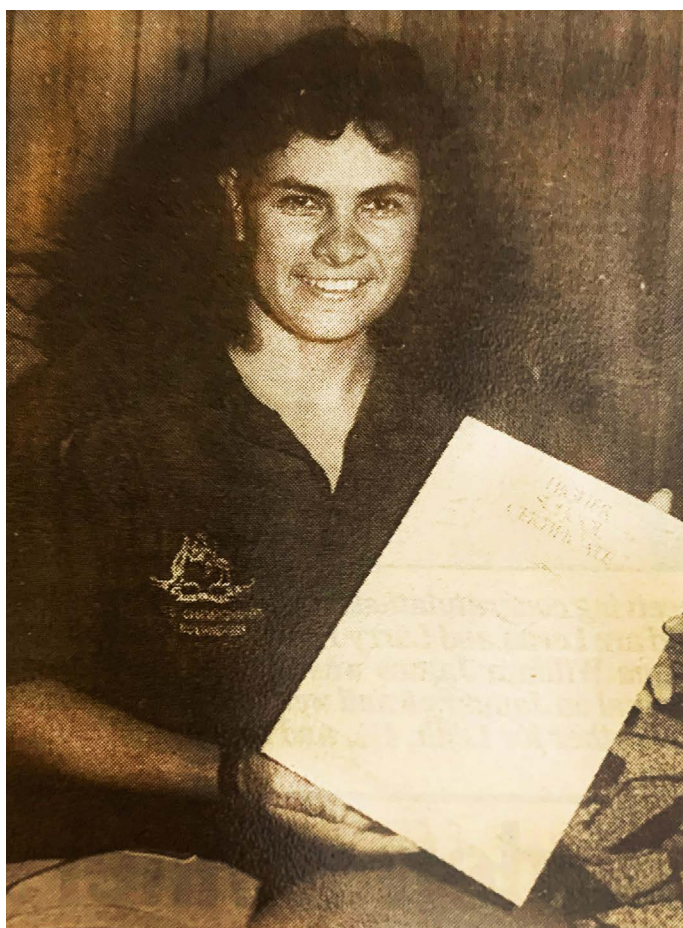


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Aboriginal artwork created by Felicity Adams who is a proud descendant of the Kamilaroi people, currently living and learning on Dharug Country.



Jodi with completed HSC

My secondary dream was always to become a PE teacher. I loved teaching, I taught all the stuffed toys in my bedroom for as long as I could remember, and so that was going to be my pathway, to go into PE teaching.

After doing the HSC, I applied to the University of Wollongong to do PE teaching and my coach said I should apply to the University of Newcastle as well. Wollongong said 'no' and I was devastated. I got an offer at Newcastle, which I deferred.

And then, Sydney Uni contacted me and said they had a course on history and Aboriginal studies.

I had done history as a part of my HSC and I really liked it. I thought, 'I'd love to teach people more about our culture and for people to get a better understanding of who we are as Aboriginal people'. And from there I got a job as the Head of Aboriginal Education at TAFE in Nowra.

The benefits of the HSC

I think the HSC is important to do. It shows that you can commit to something and follow it through to the end.

But the completion of school and the HSC also opens the up to the possibility of who you can be! Schools provide you with the knowledge to understand future tasks.

When I started concreting and was a brickie's labourer, I watched the tradies using maths formulas to work out the right angles when building. I said, "You must have been good at algebra at school". They said, "We didn't actually know that's what we were gonna use it for until we were well out of school."

The role of parents

The role of parents is probably the most intricate role; to try and nurture that learning and be the prop when the student is struggling at school. It has to be a combined effort and it still comes down to the parents being actively involved in the child's education.

My advice to high school students

Persevere with the HSC because that's going to open up a few different doors and give you the opportunity to choose which door you wanna walk through, as opposed to just not having a HSC and only being able to walk through one door.

We are always learning every day and I encourage you to be open to different ways of learning that can unlock different pathways.

Want to know more?

Visit My Future, My Culture, My Way, follow the Department of Education on social media, talk to your school, or contact your local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG).