

My Future,
My Culture,
My Way.

NSW Department of Education

Case Study – Robbie Townsend

Who I am?

I'm Robbie Townsend, I'm a Djiringanj, Ngarigo and Jerrinja man with strong links to the Snowy Mountains, Nowra and Bega areas.

As a Community Connector, I work predominantly at Bega, Narooma and Eden Marine High Schools. I've also worked as the Aboriginal Education Officer (AEO) at Bega High School.

My current role involves getting to know the local students and their families really well, which has been easy because I have those established connections in the area. It's all about getting to know the students as individuals, asking families what they need and trying to knock down some of those barriers to attendance. If kids aren't coming to school, I'll jump on the phone with parents to see what's going on. Hearing that another Koori voice cares about them, that's incredibly meaningful.

Get to know what your community needs

The great thing about being a Community Connector is the flexibility to build the role around what the community needs. In Bega, it's about having more stuff happening for young people.



Surfing with the Mob

I've been able to create some programs to meet student needs through cultural camps and programs like Surfing with the Mob. I love surfing and it's done so much for me. It keeps me mentally and physically strong and connected to Country and I wanted to share that with the kids. We first ran it during summer to keep the kids engaged over the school holidays, transporting 20 students from Bega down to the local beach at Tathra. We're getting them in the water, fishing, engaging with their Elders and community leaders.



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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.



Smoking Ceremony with students

Wake Up Well is another one, we'd pick a group of kids up in the morning and take them to the local gym and do a bit of workout. Afterwards, we'd head to the grocery store, taking the time to read those food labels to help them make healthier choices and come back to the Land Council office to do a cook-up and put on a feed before they head off to school for the day.

Helping kids get their driver's licenses has also been a priority. The transition between L's and P's has several barriers if families don't have access to a car. In a rural town such as Bega without much public transport, not having a license can often be a barrier to gaining that important work experience and employment.

Connect kids with their Elders

Connecting the kids with their local Elders creates that strong link to culture. We've got a few culturally significant and sacred places and I want to give them opportunities to learn from cultural knowledge holders.

After spending time on Country with Elders you can see by the end of the day just how much more connected the kids are as a group, which is so cool to see. I know those kids will hold onto those experiences for the rest of their lives.

School leaders also need to see the value in having Elders and community leaders present at school. Encouraging all staff to attend cultural programs and camps or participate in dance

groups lets staff see how proud these kids are of their culture and give a little insight into their world which has such a positive impact overall.

Being mentally strong and culturally strong go hand in hand

Making sure they're ready for what's to come because those final years can be hard. Some don't have that really strong support network outside school so if I can somehow help them to get through and keep them engaged with the cultural programs, they'll be feeling healthy and strong and ready to tackle any challenges.

Tips for parents and carers

I believe parents and carers are always doing the best they can. Focus on understanding just how much these kids have on their plate with the HSC and be open to helping with those stresses. Linking kids up with local services like headspace can provide that wrap-around support outside school to help them through.

It's so important for us mob to have an education

It's one of the most important things we can strive for. Getting a HSC opens so many doors, even for those that scrape through, it definitely helps in the long run.

Success to me is seeing my students get through Year 12 and if not, into a job that suits them. Whether that's working on Country, getting an apprenticeship with National Parks or just doing something that they love. Making sure they're leaving school culturally strong and proud, and knowing the strong bloodlines that they come from.

Whatever I've achieved, the thing that makes me the proudest is my mob, and the kids are the same.

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