

My Future,
My Culture,
My Way.

NSW Department of Education



Case Study – Shaun Allan

Who am I?

I am a proud Gomeroi man, originally from Walhallow but now living in the north-west of NSW in Tamworth. I completed the HSC in 1992, graduating from Quirindi High School. I now own a successful Aboriginal-owned business called Gomeroi Education and Training.

I was motivated to complete the HSC for the opportunities to educational and occupational pathways it presented. My family and community were very encouraging, I was surrounded by people who had good leadership qualities and believed in the value of hard work. It was also very motivating to see how my community wanted to see me succeed. In the 90s it was only starting to become an expectation that Aboriginal students would finish school. Many of my older cousins finished school in Year 10, so there weren't very many people in my community who had finished the HSC before me.

There were some challenges along the way

While I found the experience of finishing school very rewarding, there were no doubt some challenges along the way. I was originally from a small Aboriginal reserve which was fairly isolated. It was a 60km round trip into school, which meant early mornings to be there in time for the start at 9am.

I also needed to think outside of the box when it came to looking for mentors. This was because in the 90s, it was only becoming an expectation that more Aboriginal students would stay on to finish the HSC, so there weren't many Aboriginal HSC attainers before me. That said, my family and community were a huge source of motivation and support. Both my parents were very hard workers, and instilled in me the value of determination to do well. The community in which I lived was also encouraging me to keep going as they were always invested in seeing me succeed.

There was also support available at school. Aboriginal Education Assistance was an organisation run by a woman called Karen Clarke who helped me get through the HSC years. The organisation offered tutorial support outside of school hours where local teachers would help Aboriginal students with their learning materials. I remember Karen would also drive us home after those tutorial sessions.

I had some amazing opportunities and new experiences while at school

I was heavily involved in sport which opened opportunities to travel the world. I was part of the school's touch footy team which took me on a South Pacific tour to play in a tournament around New Zealand, Tonga and Hawaii.



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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.

I also had opportunities to play in other tournaments and experience the hospitality of people from all over the world.

There are many exciting and unique opportunities that present themselves outside of formal education during the last years of school. The growth that comes from doing new things and meeting new people is incredibly valuable, and another reason to consider finishing Year 12.

The importance of community and the role of Culture

The support I had from my family and community was so important to keep me on track and motivated to complete the HSC. I lived in a tight-knit Aboriginal reserve, which immediately gave me a connection to culture. Living in a reserve created kinship, connection and shared behaviours that instilled within me a sense of wellbeing and belonging. It was so helpful to have this sense of belonging through school, as support was always given when it was needed and vice versa.

My community was also the reason I was able to participate in all the wonderful overseas sporting tournaments. This was because the sponsorships and costs for the overseas travel and arrangements were taken care of by the community. There was a sense of 'whenever support was needed it was given', and as I mentioned before, the community was always invested in seeing their members succeed. I am very grateful for my community for allowing me to have these experiences through my school years. Before I embarked overseas and to big cities for tournaments, I had barely been out of my local area. There was no doubt that these experiences pushed me out of my comfort zone. They were also very rewarding, only adding to the opportunities that came my way because I completed the HSC.

Upon reflection on my life's past experiences, I realised that I was a product of the good that came before me. It was the generosity and support of my family and community that helped me along my journey. The purpose and passion that I find in my working life today, is to make sure I am giving back to my community that helped me so much.

Where am I now

I am running my own business called Gomeroi Education and Training. The organisation's purpose is to provide formal accredited and non-accredited education and training in the New England region. Gomeroi Education also runs Aboriginal cultural awareness courses with various organisations, including government, NGOs and private sector, to provide authentic cultural knowledge. The organisation also provides mentoring sessions to Aboriginal students to provide the support that is necessary to get through the course work.

To create a successful business, I made sure to understand the motivation behind the students' desire to gain further qualifications. Almost always, it was to give back to their community with students seeking out accreditations in education, health and community services related courses. Giving back is what has always motivated me on my career path following high school, as it was the support of my family and community that helped me get to where I am today.

My advice to students who are going through the HSC now

Some advice that I would give to students who are about to enter the HSC years is to look to those around you for inspiration. I'm sure that you don't need to look that far find someone who has finished the HSC and gone on to do some very inspiring and interesting things.

I would also say that while the HSC is challenging, it is only a year (or two) of your life in the grand scheme of things. It is a short time that is bound to set some strong foundations and opportunity for the rest of your life.

Want to know more?

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