

## INDIGENOUS SUCCESS WITH LYDIA BISSET

### **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 as well.

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 I undertook in 2020 that was 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 university 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 was part of the advisory group on the Fellowship.

### **Dr Bunda**

Hi everyone. I am a Ngugi/Wakka Wakka woman and I’m the Director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit and head of academic programs at the University of Queensland within that unit.

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. We need to think about the influences within our life, and those experiences, perhaps we need to also consider the locations and the contexts in which we find ourselves, and of course, cultural matters. All of this leads us to have a projection about leadership. 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 this diversity, and the different perspectives on the use of these terms.

### **Dr Barney**

We hope the podcast series is useful for outreach practitioners working with Indigenous students, but we also hope that the podcast is useful for anyone with an interest in student equity and student success in higher education more generally. The theme of this episode is around how the shift to online outreach activities during Covid has worked in practice, and our guest today is Lydia Bisset. Lydia is an Indigenous Student Recruitment Officer at Swinburne University of Technology. Welcome, Lydia, to the Indigenous Success podcast.

### **Lydia Bisset**

Thank you very much.

**Dr Bunda**

Lydia, I'm really looking forward to our podcast today, and you speaking because I really want to know about how we can do this really successfully online, but first up, can you introduce yourself in any way that makes you comfortable?

**Lydia Bisset**

Thank you. My name is Lydia Bisset. I'm a proud woman from Tasmania from the North-East of beautiful Tassie, and I've been living and working, and thriving on Wurundjeri Country for nine years now and I'm very grateful to the Country and the ancestors here for looking after me during that time. I am the Indigenous Student Recruitment Officer at Swinburne University of Technology, and I work within the Indigenous Student Support Team in the Moondani Toombadool Centre.

**Dr Bunda**

Do you mind to tell us a little bit more about that role you have at Swinburne?

**Lydia Bisset**

For us, this is the second year we've had this recruitment role; the role started during the online space which has been interesting. The idea of the role was to allow a holistic approach to student recruitment and support so, I have the opportunity and the pleasure to get to know students and their parents during the course selection process, to develop a trust with the students, ensure they're on the best pathway for where they want to head long-term, and to explore their scholarship and accommodation options. I can then hand these beautiful students over to our Indigenous Student Advisers for ongoing support, for help with tutoring, to attend cultural and social events, and to join our community at Swinburne, which has been really successful for us, even in this online space.

**Dr Barney**

So Lydia, we know that pre-Covid most universities were running face-to-face outreach programs for Indigenous students that brought students onto campus, but then because of Covid, this has been more difficult, and a few universities have shifted to offering online outreach activities. Can you tell us a bit about the transition of outreach activities for Indigenous students to online that Swinburne's offering?

**Lydia Bisset**

Swinburne in general created last year, Swintopia, which is an online interactive approach to Open Day, which includes avatars of key people, a virtual campus that they can tour around and attend course sessions. That will be running this year as well in conjunction with our regular, on-campus Open Day, Covid allowing. For Indigenous students, we held last year the Indigenous Tertiary Information Session online – these sessions regularly are delivered all across Victoria; we had many, many planned this year – we got to deliver one in Ballarat before we were put back into lockdown. So we'll be looking at online events for later in the year as well, but last year, we had a lot of success with this online Indigenous Tertiary Information Session; we had students in Years 11 and 12 register from Melbourne, regional Victoria, Canberra, and Sydney. They were able to be given information on VTAC, general application information, any study support information, AbStudy, and then they had the opportunity to meet with all the Koori units from the different Victorian universities to

discuss specific course questions and find out what those units offered for Indigenous students.

**Dr Barney**

You know, I guess one benefit of having it online is that students from all across the nation are able to participate in some of those programs and information sessions. What do you think is the best aspect or the highlights of having those programs online?

**Lydia Bisset**

Online, as you said, the access and the reach that we can get online to students from all over the country, but also a lot of rural and regional students were able to access information that maybe they wouldn't have regularly been able to do; they may not have been able to attend an in-person session. In the past, a lot of this information is delivered to rural and regional students via email or on the phone, but being in the Zoom and the Team space, gives you that connection to students that you may not have otherwise got, and they get a familiar face, you get to read where they're at, you get to provide live information to them by sharing your screen, and I think where some students may not have had that connection, this really brings them into the community and welcomes them, and they get to connect to myself and my colleagues, and feel like they could be part of that university, which I think is much better than just your usual email inquiries.

**Dr Bunda**

I can see just talking about the benefit, how that works. One of the things that Katelyn's Fellowship found, Lydia, was that the cultural aspects of outreach programs were really important. Could you just talk a little bit about the ability to do any cultural elements within online programs that you're offering?

**Lydia Bisset**

For outreach, we have a lot of online cultural programs that we've been running with our current students, but for outreach, a big thing for us is having current Indigenous students speak to the prospective students, and they just give a really good perspective on their journey to move away from home, to find their pathway, and to engage with the support and the cultural events on offer to them on campus and online. That connection, and seeing other mob, and seeing them succeed and hear their stories, we have found to be really beneficial to prospective students to see where they might find their own place, and they get to hear about those cultural events. It's difficult with some things, like we've done weaving, we've done painting at home where we send kits out to people – it's tricky, but again, being able to see faces, and see faces of other students, I think really breaks down the barrier that can be there in the online space.

**Dr Bunda**

Would there be anything else you have to add in terms of the benefits of online programs?

**Lydia Bisset**

We've had quite a lot of students who were able to commence their course online, which for them, meant staying at home, on Country, with family and community, and that's been really beneficial, especially for some of the younger students to be able to stay within their support network whilst starting their study journey, and then down the line they have the option of moving and starting to study on campus when they're ready. That's been hugely beneficial

for some; some find it difficult studying online, but for others, continuing their study without having to leave home has been really great for some people.

**Dr Barney**

That sounds like a really important benefit for some students in terms of being able to stay at home, and where they're comfortable, and still be able to study at university. Lydia, how effective do you think online outreach programs are? For the Fellowship, I didn't focus on any online programs, and certainly a finding was that the peer-to-peer connections that students make are really important. Can you talk a bit more about that, and how effective you think it works online, and are those connections still able to be made?

**Lydia Bisset**

It's certainly challenging for some, and it, in many ways, is not the same as being able to do it in person, but I think a lot of things study and work-wise, a lot of things are heading into the online space now, and I think it's a really great skill for students to be able to operate in the online space to connect to each other. There's so many platforms we utilise where students can join groups and work together in class, but also join friendship and social groups. So, I think the recruitment space is similar in that it is shifting into that online space, and so much of the information we provide to students now is online, and we're always directing them online so I think it's worked quite smoothly for us, and students have shown a lot of resilience in stepping up and being confident in the online space, and taking charge of what they're looking for, and finding their own information.

And I think whilst it's been difficult, I think the skills that students are developing by managing their own futures in this way online, I think is going to be really beneficial in the long-term.

**Dr Bunda**

Lydia, if I can just take up on that point. I think you're speaking in to my next question which is: what is your definition or understanding of "success"? What does that mean to you, particularly because we have named this podcast as "Indigenous Success – doing it, thinking it, and being it" – what's "success" for you?

**Lydia Bisset**

In the university space, it means mob having access to any pathway that they want to take, that they're given information and opportunities to follow any dreams that they have, and given autonomy over what they want to study, how they want to study it, flexibility in delivery, and in full-time, part-time, online – I think "success" is when we're given the opportunity to study our own way, and for Indigenous students, that's grounded in their own culture, and writing their own path based on their own experience, and allowing students to have that self-determination where they get to really decide where they want to go. And our job is to support them and give them every opportunity to succeed.

**Dr Bunda**

True. Open the door and they will walk through. Thank you very much, Lydia. Unless there's something else that you wanted to add that you haven't had a chance yet to speak about.

**Lydia Bisset**

My hat is off to all students who are studying in this space. It's strange but we're seeing so much success and there's so much support available, and some of the benefits that we've discussed, but really, young people - I'm really impressed with the resilience that's being shown and I think students will find benefit to going through this. I think there's the resilience-building, and the confidence-building I think will pay off in the long run.

**Dr Bunda**

Our bubbas now are just adding to the ranks of education warriors.

**Dr Barney**

Thanks, Lydia. Thanks so much for joining us. It was great to hear about the online space, and what can be done in outreach activities, especially in the current kind of climate. So, thanks for joining us.

**Lydia Bisset**

My pleasure. Thanks so much for having me.

**Dr Bunda**

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.

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