

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students share positive stories to help develop drug and alcohol prevention program

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from Western Sydney and Tasmania will have their stories included in a culturally inclusive school-based drug and alcohol prevention program developed by researchers from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at UNSW Sydney after winning a national competition.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth aged 12-14 were invited by the researchers, who are developing the program specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, to share a written story, video, speech or song about a time when they made a positive choice and positive role models who influenced their choice.

The stories will inform the development of an Australian Government Department of Health funded drug and alcohol prevention program. The work is overseen by a national reference group which includes Indigenous community leaders.

The Hon Ken Wyatt Minister for Aged Care and Minister for Indigenous Health presented one of the winners, Jacob, a 13-year-old from Darug Land in Western Sydney, with his award certificate at UNSW.

Jacob shared how he looks up to Ricky, an Aboriginal year 12 student in his school who has brought together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by teaching them about Aboriginal culture, such as the War Cry.

“Some of the boys were mucking around and mocking it,” Jacob wrote in his story. “He taught them how to be respectful of Aboriginal people, and how important our culture is, not just to us but to them. They don’t mock it anymore.”

Minister Wyatt congratulated Jacob and the other winners for telling stories that engage lots of young people because they are about issues that many can relate to.

“The competition unearthed many moving and uplifting stories about role models, positive turning points in young people’s lives, overcoming drug or alcohol use and resisting peer pressure,” said Minister Wyatt.

“The entries received show the intrinsic value of connection to country, community and culture in helping our children to make positive choices throughout their lives.”

Project Manager Dr Mieke Snijder said researchers were travelling around the country to consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and hear about everyday lived experiences in their communities to inform the storylines in the program.

Merlin Crossley, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at UNSW congratulated the students.

“The impressive submissions demonstrate the quality of writing and storytelling abilities of young Indigenous students across the country,” Crossley said. “UNSW Sydney is committed to developing and supporting learning opportunities that celebrate Indigenous knowledge, culture and histories.”

The winning entry came from Emily (14 years old from Tasmania), who shared her artwork and accompanying story about Aboriginal culture in her community, and the importance of learning from her elders how to make shell necklaces.

“My good decision was to start making shell necklaces and it has connected me to thousands of years of my history. This has made me feel that I belong and very happy that some day I will pass this tradition down to my family.” – Emily (excerpt from winning story)

Jacob’s fellow runner up Clair (13 years old from NSW) wrote about the positive choices she made in choosing schools. Because she was having a hard time at her current school, Clair wanted to move. She made the decision to discuss this plan with her mother and grandmother who were supportive of her. But in the end, she made the positive choice to stay at her current school with all her friends.

Read Jacob’s story: <https://positivechoices.org.au/information/positive-choices-storytelling-competition-jacobs-story/>

Read Emily’s story: <https://positivechoices.org.au/information/positive-choices-storytelling-competition-emilys-story/>

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