A strong advocate for TAFE and community

By Nel Williams



Chanelle Williams (pictured above) is a lecturer in early childhood education and care at North Regional TAFE (NRTAFE) in Broome and has served as the SSTUWA branch representative for Broome, Derby and Fitzroy Crossing. Chanelle, who is better known as Nel, was named trainer of the year at the WA Training Awards last September and nominated for VET (vocational education and training) trainer of the year at the Australian Training Awards in Darwin last December.

I became a member of the SSTUWA in mid-2024, inspired by the industrial action taking place prior to the new lecturers' award being won and was then voted in as the branch representative earlier last year.

I thoroughly enjoy the role of advocating for positive change and the rights of my fellow lecturing colleagues. Lecturers, trainers and teachers should be supported to do just that – teach! So often we see an overload of administrative tasks and system processes that take away from being able to provide high quality programs and support for our students. My priority as an SSTUWA representative is to be a voice for lecturing staff and to ensure the focus remains on lecturer wellbeing, as well as what is best for students, stakeholders and community.

As a proud member of the NRTAFE Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Team, I work alongside four other dedicated lecturers across the Kimberley and Pilbara.

Together, we are fiercely committed to delivering high-quality, inclusive education that not only inspires our students but also prepares them to thrive in the early childhood sector long-term. Our team has developed a delivery model that ensures every student, no matter where they live, has access to meaningful learning, assessment and support.

This includes a strong online theory component, complemented by weekly in-person visits to students' workplaces or placement sites. Where distance makes face-to-face visits challenging, we maintain connection through weekly Teams meetings. We're not just delivering training, we're building a workforce that is skilled, confident and deeply connected to the communities they serve.

My role in this work has been to build the ECEC online learning platform on Blackboard.

Although I had no prior experience with Blackboard or any online learning management systems, I drew inspiration from my training with online learning expert Denise Cox and collaborated closely with fellow lecturers who were already experienced with the platform.

I placed a strong emphasis on creating a space that is user-friendly, seamless and intuitive for students – ensuring that the technology supports their learning rather than becoming a barrier.

I was involved in implementing the creation of one of the main key components of this platform: pre-recorded knowledge sessions that were short in length (no more than 15-20 minutes each) featuring different members of the early childhood team as well as special guests from the local community and a range of subject matter experts.

The goal with these sessions was to provide students with easily digestible, engaging, thought provoking sessions that they could choose to watch at times that fit their work and lifestyle. With the majority of our students in the Kimberley and Pilbara working in industry, it was important that we created a program that was of high quality yet provided enough flexibility that allowed work/study/life balance for students.

In addition to this, I also travel approximately 2,000km per term to visit my students who live in more remote places such as Derby and Fitzroy Crossing to ensure they are supported in their studies.

My collaboration with Ngunga Group Women's Aboriginal Corporation began in 2020, when I was invited by the organisation to deliver the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care to a small group of their playgroup educators.

Over the past five years, I have worked closely with Ngunga Group to tailor the early childhood program to suit the unique cultural and community context of the Derby region. This has included adapting delivery methods and content to ensure accessibility and relevance for local students.

Ngunga Group Women's Aboriginal Corporation is currently preparing to open a new approved early childhood service in Derby. The central focus of the pathway into and delivery of the early childhood qualifications is to build a skilled and qualified team of local educators who will be ready to take on key roles in the new centre from its inception.

Through the creation and implementation of the unique online program, I have seen a significant increase in engagement from students across the Kimberley, compared to the previous paper-based assessments.

This program allows us to track in real time a student's progress, which allows appropriate intervention and support to be applied sooner and therefore higher levels of completion. I have also seen students' digital literacy skills shine through in their submissions and evidence of these skills being applied in their daily work – this being a huge benefit not only to their organisation but also in the way they see themselves as active contributors to their work and community.

My main focus for my students has always been to encourage and foster self-confidence, wellbeing, ambition and pride.

My primary role is to teach students about educating and caring for children and to support them in completing their qualifications. The majority of my students living in places such as Derby and Fitzroy Crossing are local to these communities and, through their work as early childhood educators, provide essential services while also serving as role models others in the community can look up to. Through engaging in and completing studies, maintaining employment, advancing in their work roles and contributing positively to the community they also show what's possible for others.

I was incredibly honoured to be nominated and then win the trainer of the year award.

To be recognised for the work I am doing has been an incredible experience. I absolutely love what I do. To be able to connect with many different communities, build partnerships and collaborate to create meaningful programs is an honour and a privilege – it doesn't feel like work.

I am part of something bigger than myself, part of building stronger communities and stronger futures for not only the children and families within these communities, but also its young people, entering the world of employment and study.

I am so proud to be representing WA at the Australian Training Awards and looking forward to celebrating those who have been recognised in various fields across the country at their own award ceremonies. [Editor's note: The Trainer of the Year award was eventually won by hospitality trainer Penelope Mackay,
from NSW.]

I have worked in TAFE for five years now and it has been really wonderful to see the shift in recognition for the VET sector and its importance in communities in the Kimberley and Pilbara.

The VET sector is no longer viewed as merely a “second-best option” to university. Instead, it is increasingly recognised as an equally valuable pathway – one that offers flexibility, respect and practical opportunities for career development.

In places such as Derby and Fitzroy Crossing, access to adult education and relevant support is one of the biggest barriers for local members of the community. TAFE ensures learning is accessible and supportive, adapting to the challenges faced by students in remote areas and enabling professionals to meet students where they are.

Going forward, I will continue to be a strong voice for the early childhood profession – for high quality programs and meaningful qualifications that prepare students for one of the most important jobs there is, caring for and educating children.

I will continue to advocate for regional and remote communities in WA to ensure they have access to the same high-quality programs available in metropolitan areas. I’m excited to further this work by building on recent partnerships with lecturers from South Regional TAFE, collaborating to develop meaningful programs that benefit all TAFE students.

I will also remain a strong advocate for the rights of WA TAFE lecturers in my role as an SSTUWA representative.



Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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