

## Talking Together - Elder Profiles

### Uncle Wayne Fossey



Uncle Wayne Fossey is a member of the Elders Advisory Board (EAB) to the Vice Chancellor, and community Elder from the Beenleigh area

#### Where are you from?

I was born in Nambour and raised on the banks of the Petrie creek in a tin shed with a dirt floor. My father was a soldier who returned from WWII and married a local girl. Life growing up was a happy one. My grandfather on my dad's side, was a fella born near Raglan, he was taken by a white fella and put on board a ship. He ended up wandering the west in places like Roma, Cunnamulla and Charleville. He fitted in and survived working odd jobs.

#### What is your professional story?

I started working when I was 9; my first job was working on a farm. Growing up education was an important part of my life and I was successful in a scholarship and went on to study at University at a young age. I became a teacher at first and then went further on to be a subject master, deputy principal and then principal. I later took time off from work to conduct research into historical records and was a part of various research projects, such as the outer lesson suicide of female Indigenous girls around the world in places like Hawaii, Canada, Belgium and France. My education has allowed me to educate others.

## How are you involved in your community?

It has been a privilege for me to be a part of this community in the last 40 years. My involvement in my community has led me to work with children and young men, especially those who are not coping with society. I have worked with 17 year olds who could not read or write and most of the children who come to us have been removed from their previous schools for various reasons. Recently Willy Davis and I have been working on the Spear's program, which involves working with traditional knowledge and introducing young men to traditional ways such as how to make and throw a spear. It also includes learning and teaching around food and the purposes behind traditional male ceremony. The program creates strength in the young men who participate in the program which is enduring strength as it has proven to have a lasting effect.

This community has struggled socio-economically and my work has involved building community capacity, we share food with food drops, we have seen the development of the housing co-op which consists of 27 houses. We have been involved with unique employment projects which saw 128 people go through an Aboriginal only security course, everyone passed. The course was invented and registered through TAFE. From this people were successful getting jobs in the mines, at airports and other organizations. This project gave people the opportunity to break out of the unemployment cycle with a real job.

I have learnt a lot from spending time with my Elders, especially the male role models in my life. There are many people out there with a great deal of knowledge and what it takes is time to listen to them. If you sit and get to listen to Uncle Herbie Wharton like I did when we were out bush together, every single time I am with him I am learning. That knowledge and sharing of knowledge applies to so many people in community so we need to redevelop this system of learning.

## How would you like USQ to be involved with your community?

I believe it is important that Aboriginal science is taught at universities which will allow a different understanding into the nature of Indigenous knowledges. If you take the plant Gumbi Gumbi as an example it is a simple yet a complex plant, which has many medicinal benefits you can gain by drinking or ingesting it. The plant has a significant representation for health care within traditional knowledges and this knowledge should be shared as an Indigenous product with Indigenous recognition.

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