

VIBE ACTIVITIES

Stay Strong – *Community First* pages 22 and 23

Community first

Standing strong and passing down know

WHEN AUNTY DENISE PROUD HEARD SHE WAS TO BE HONOURED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SUNSHINE COAST AS AN HONORARY SENIOR FELLOW, SHE SAT DOWN AND CRIED BECAUSE IT MEANT THE COMMUNITY WAS ACKNOWLEDGING HER WORK. GIVING BACK TO COMMUNITY IS WHAT DRIVES THIS ELDER, WHO WAS BORN ON CHERBOURG MISSION AND HAS OFTEN LED THE WAY BACK TO CULTURE AND STRENGTH IN IDENTITY FOR MANY OF HER PEOPLE.

Aunty Denise, 61, Indigenous educator, community services worker and artist, received the award before a large crowd at the university's Graduation Ceremony for 2013.

The former early childhood educator, born in Cherbourg on Wakka Wakka country, is recognised nationally and internationally for helping Indigenous and non-Indigenous people through her academic, professional and leadership roles.

"I sit on the committees at the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) and give advice and support to Indigenous students and raise awareness amongst the non-Indigenous about our culture and traditions. As you know, still to this day, there is a lack of awareness. We need to pass on our knowledge and have an equal voice, and to do that you've got to get involved," she says.

"With any of the students, whether they're from the country or this is their first university experience, it can be daunting. Some are not used to learning through more formal

"I think being a leader means that when you come up against challenges, you don't wallow in self pity; you get up and be strong."

education and they need our support because we want to retain them, so they can become our future leaders."

Raising cultural awareness among non-Indigenous people is particularly important to Aunty Denise.

"Some do not have a lot of experience with Indigenous people and they really need to get to know our community at the grassroots level because they are coming into community to work, staying a short time and we need to deepen their knowledge and raise that awareness," she says.

Her work on the committees is a 'real reconciliation' process because it provides an 'equal platform' and consultation before action. Breaking through the barriers to create common understanding is what Aunty Denise loves and she draws on the leadership example of her parents to do that.

"I use my home as a place of meeting. If the university wants to meet me then they come into my home before we set up a committee. Usually you go to their building but I do it the other way round. I have worked in prisons for 18 years and set up the cultural centre at the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre at Wacol.

"I know we have to speak up in our ways of learning and knowing and being. That's how I operate, and I fight for what I believe



VIBE ACTIVITIES

Stay Strong – *Community First* pages 22 and 23

STAY STRONG

Edge for tomorrow's leaders

in through our ways. My mother used to say you've got to learn the whitefella and the blackfella way for your survival. I learned the whitefella way and from a lot of different cultures, but I am true to my blackfella way in all my communications."

The cultural centre at Arthur Gorrie was true to Aunty Denise's way and based on Aboriginal beliefs and culture. At the centre, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inmates were able to have pride in their culture and it reinforced their identity and empowered them with cultural heritage.

"I would say to them you are a warrior and you can stand strong."

It's this deeply ingrained sense of identity that helps Aunty Denise empower others and be a leader. Her father was a lore man at the Cherbourg Mission and her mother instilled in her a belief she could achieve anything, despite growing up in the era of the Aboriginal Protection Act in Queensland and on the Mission.

"Growing up in Cherbourg, people put you down but I started the first early childhood centre at 17 years of age in Cherbourg and that was because of my role models, my parents Olga and Livingston Chambers, who said you can do anything you want," she says.

"I think being a leader means that when you come up against challenges, you don't wallow in self pity; you get up and be strong. Sometimes I have faced challenges from my own people, but I think you've got to do what feels right in your heart. I am very grounded in culture.

"And giving back to community is how we were raised. For me, community is everything. There are three things you have to do: you must be involved and proud of your blood, you must be proud of your heritage and you must identify with and give back to your community."

Aunty Denise's current work focuses on the Reconciliation Queensland committee and Anglicare's Nalingu Centre in Brisbane, as well as early childhood guest lectures and cultural awareness workshops around the country.

She paints at her home studio at The Gap, Brisbane, where she lives with her husband David. Her daughter Monique, who lives on the Sunshine Coast, helped introduce AIME (Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience) to USC in 2011.

Aunty Denise Proud (wearing both her Indigenous and her green Honorary Senior Fellow stoles) is congratulated by USC's Chancellor John Dobson OAM and Vice-Chancellor Professor Greg Hill.

Aunty Denise Proud was born on Cherbourg mission. She has recently been acknowledged by the University of the Sunshine Coast as an honorary senior fellow.

Read *Stay Strong – Community First* pages 22 and 23



ACTIVITY 1



1 Explain what leadership means to you.

2 Explain why “raising cultural awareness among non-Indigenous people” is so important to Denise Proud.

3 Explain how Denise Proud's work is "a real reconciliation process".

Write
your answer
on the lines.

4 How would you describe Denise Proud's values and beliefs?

5 In what ways could you give back to your community?

