IGNITE



‘CONNEKTING’ GENERATIONS
THE *VALUE* OF TRADE SKILLS

MY STUDENT STORY
WITH KATE GROWDEN

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?
MEET ARTIST EMMALINE ZANELLI

ISSUE 1 – SEPTEMBER 2026

tafeSA

Government of South Australia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

TAFE SA acknowledges the traditional owners of the land. It is a privilege to be sharing this land on which we live, work and learn.

We recognise that this land has always been a place of teaching, learning and knowledge sharing. We acknowledge the deep and enduring spiritual connection the First Nation's people have to this land and their ongoing contributions to education.

TAFE SA recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have maintained their culture, heritage, beliefs, languages, and lores and these are of ongoing importance.

We commit ourselves to learning from the wisdom and knowledge of the Traditional Owners and to fostering a spirit of respect, inclusivity, and reconciliation within our community.

Artwork
Karen Briggs (Yorta Yorta)



FOREWORD

A MESSAGE FROM TAFE SA'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE



TAFE SA is, above all else, about the people of South Australia.

Our students come from all walks of life, with diverse experiences and aspirations. Many are just starting out on their career path, while others are building on existing skills or changing career directions. Some are recently-arrived migrants, while others are returning to study after time away from the workforce. Supporting our diverse student cohort are passionate educators, who bring a wealth of industry knowledge straight to the classroom, and industry partners who ensure our training remains relevant and responsive to our state's workforce needs.

The stories in this inaugural issue of Ignite reflect that diversity. From the arts to the trades, event management to early childhood education and care, we're shining a spotlight on the students, graduates, educators, and employers who are innovating in industry and making a real difference in their communities.

As South Australia's public provider of vocational education and training (VET), we exist for all South Australians. It is our priority to ensure all people in our state have access to high-quality, industry-connected, and student-centred learning experiences. We are committed to building a skilled and sustainable workforce, and advancing our state's economic, social, and cultural development.

Ignite shines a light on TAFE SA success stories. While these stories are only a small sample of the work taking place across our campuses and regions, they demonstrate the value of vocational education and the many different pathways it can create.

I am proud of the work our students, educators, staff, and industry partners do every day, and I hope you enjoy reading their stories.

Adam Kilvert
TAFE SA Chief Executive

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‘CONNEKTING’ GENERATIONS

“I LOOK BACK AT EVERY LITTLE STEPPING STONE AND I’M GRATEFUL FOR EVERY OPPORTUNITY I WAS GIVEN,” *SAYS TAFE SA GRADUATE* ***MATTHEW KIRKBRIDE****, FOUNDER AND OWNER OF* ***CONNEKT PLUMBING****, A LEADING HYDRAULIC SERVICES CONTRACTOR IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA. RECENTLY CELEBRATING CONNEKT’S 10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY, MATT IS* ***REFLECTING ON HOW THE BUSINESS HAS EVOLVED OVER THE PAST DECADE*** *AND ITS PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY TODAY.*

Matt began as a sole trader running Connekt “essentially out of a van”— the business now turns over $18 million in revenue and employs 70+ staff. “I started the business with nothing,” Matt remembers. “I didn’t have financial backing or a wealthy family. All I had was ambition and the willingness to roll up my sleeves and do the hard work.”

As a young apprentice, he didn’t plan to be a business owner: “Early on, all I wanted to do was surf and have a bit of money,” says Matt, who has a Certificate III in Plumbing (CPC32420) and a Certificate IV in Plumbing Services (CPC40920) from TAFE SA. One opportunity led to another, and he rapidly learned leadership skills as part of his apprenticeship. “As an apprentice, you’re dealing directly with the managing directors and the wider team, and therefore you begin to feel a sense of responsibility for the performance of the whole team. You start taking on mentor and management roles as part of your work.”

“I WAS LUCKY TO HAVE RECEIVED MANY OPPORTUNITIES THAT OPENED DOORS FOR ME—EMPLOYERS ACKNOWLEDGED MY ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROMOTED ME.”

Matt had initially discovered plumbing via work experience in high school while he was completing Year 10. He quickly realised that the trade was a good fit for him, and that vocational education aligned with his learning style more than a tertiary pathway. “I decided not to go back to school after I completed that year,” he explains. “At the time, that path wasn’t always understood, but I was confident it was the right fit for me, and my parents backed me with the decision. I worked hard to become proficient in my trade.” Matt feels strongly about the need to promote diversity in learning—all students should be encouraged to learn in ways that respond to their natural proclivities, while outdated hierarchies in educational pathways should be challenged. “Now the trades can offer you a flourishing career, but it wasn’t viewed like that when I was growing up. I’m glad that parents and governments are starting to realise how important trade skills are.”

Matt understands that many students don’t receive the opportunities they deserve through strictly academic-based schooling. He wants to emphasise the disadvantage that this can cause and how it can impact young people’s self-esteem. “Never accept that you’re not as good as someone else because you’ve chosen a vocational pathway,” he advises. To redress this imbalance and enhance the overall apprenticeship experience, Connekt nurtures young apprentices through a unique cadetship program with a company-developed curriculum that is taught every quarter: “An apprentice is someone who is building their skills and career, they’re not to be used as unskilled labour. Connekt is very conscious of that and the need to work closely with every apprentice to harness their individual skills.”



Matthew Kirkbride, founder and owner of Connekt Plumbing, is a TAFE SA graduate

"PARENTS AND GOVERNMENTS ARE STARTING TO REALISE HOW IMPORTANT TRADE SKILLS ARE."



"I was fortunate to have been given many great opportunities. I'm not saying that they fell on my lap—I certainly put myself out there and worked really hard. But I also recognise that someone can do all those same things and still miss out if they're not in an environment where their potential is recognised and supported. I like to ensure my apprentices are getting the same chances that I did, and I want them to know that Connekt is championing them to succeed."

One such apprentice is Callan McKenzie, TAFE SA graduate and winner of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year Award at the 2025 South Australian Training Awards. Callan has just completed his apprenticeship, and Matt is preparing to celebrate the milestone with him and his family at the Connekt head office.

Callan was drawn to the variety of skills that a plumbing trade offers. Whether it's working on a new residential project or a larger commercial build, as Callan explains, plumbing is not a static career. "Plumbing is not just what you hear about in the mainstream: unblocking toilets and sewer drains and all that. The reality is we're doing a lot of water mains, gas mains, we're installing basins and showers, working on big and small construction projects—there's a huge variety in your everyday role, and a broad range of skill sets are required."

At 21 years old, Callan was determined to become a qualified plumber early and has his ambitions set on further professional development. "My main focus right now is to build my craft at Connekt and expand my skill set. I'd also like to develop my leadership skills with the construction crew we have on site," Callan says. "I know that many opportunities can open up once you have your qualification."

Witnessing career progression, from apprentice to qualified plumber, is one of the most rewarding aspects of the business for Matt. "Watching apprentices start and finish their trade, celebrating their qualification with them—like with Callan —makes me very emotional," he says, visibly moved.

Callan is also quick to point out that the real reward lies in supporting others. "It's about making sure my peers have the same opportunities and a strong future in the trade. I want apprentices to develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to build successful careers. That's the main goal." With that in mind, Callan is already planning the next steps in his professional development. While he enjoys being on the tools, he sees mentoring as an important part of his future. "I'm happy being a tradesman right now, but my long-term goal is to run jobs and mentor apprentices—putting them in the right hands and giving them the best advice so they can become quality tradespeople themselves."



"WATCHING APPRENTICES START AND FINISH THEIR TRADE, AND THEN CELEBRATING THEIR QUALIFICATION WITH THEM – LIKE WITH CALLAN – MAKES ME VERY EMOTIONAL"

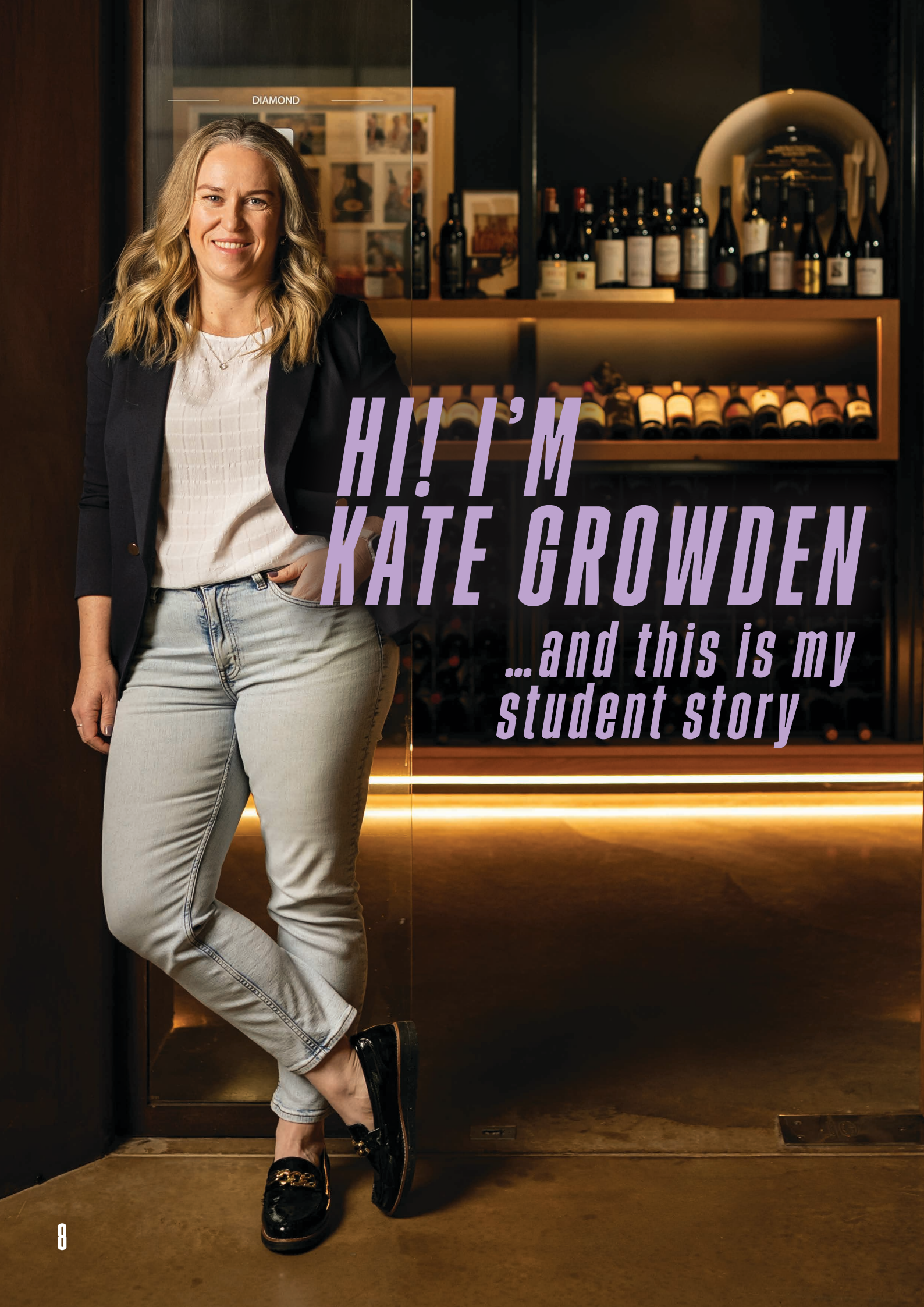
Plumber Callan McKenzie, a TAFE SA graduate, is thriving in the supportive environment at Connekt Plumbing

Connekt combined their most recent Christmas party with a 10-year anniversary celebration. Industry partners, suppliers, and clients were invited to the joint Christmas and birthday bash. "The celebration forced me to think carefully about the last decade, the milestones and the challenges we successfully navigated—like COVID, for example," Matt says. "The pandemic was a bit frightening at first, but we managed to find opportunities to grow our business through it. It couldn't have happened without hard work from everyone employed here; it's always a team effort."





Building a business means growing both a team and a community, and Connekt has the right ethos to balance a people-centred organisation with its position as a business leader within the plumbing sector. "The word 'team' is probably the cornerstone of our success," Matt says. "Connekt wants to build something that develops people, not just employs them." With businesses like Connekt and talented recent TAFE SA graduates like Callan, the future of South Australia's workforce is in capable hands.



HI! I'M KATE GROWDEN

...and this is my student story



Kate Growden is in her final year of the Bachelor of Tourism, Hospitality and Events Management (CRS1400588) at TAFE SA's Barossa campus. She was a recipient of the Destination Australia scholarship and is on the TAFE SA Student Voice committee.

In 2023, after returning to work following a period of parental leave, I found myself at a crossroads. Did I want to continue along my current career path, or did I want to retrain for another industry entirely? The thought of beginning a new career from scratch was frightening—but so was the thought of staying in a role I'd felt I'd outgrown just because it was stable and familiar.

At the time, I was a shift manager at a stock feed manufacturing plant. I managed 33 men at a 24/7 facility, and I'd worked there for seven years already. I realised I had fallen into that career rather than truly chosen it. I wasn't passionate about my work, and it was increasingly difficult to reconcile the demands of the job, including limited work from home provisions, with raising a young child.

I began to think more seriously about my interests, passions and strengths, and I was conscious about setting a good example for my young daughter. I wanted to pursue a career that would feel rewarding in the long run; I wanted to feel fulfilled rather than depleted by my work. Most of all, I wanted to model courage and demonstrate to my daughter that it is never too late to try a new path.

As all these hopes and fears swirled around my mind, I happened to watch Premier Malinauskas on the news announcing the launch of fee-free TAFE courses. I attended an information session at the TAFE SA Regency campus and ended up enrolling in Certificate III in Events (SIT30522). Six months into my course, one of my lecturers tapped me on the shoulder and encouraged me to apply for the Destination Australia Scholarship. It felt like the new path I had embarked on was meant to be.

The Destination Australia Scholarship supports students studying a bachelor's degree in Tourism, Hospitality and Events Management in the Barossa Valley. The idea behind it is to encourage students to live within the region and contribute to the local workforce. I live in beautiful Freeling, on the outer edges of the Barossa (or 'Gungellan' as it is alternatively known from McLeod's Daughters). The opportunity to stay in my local community while studying, and eventually working, held great appeal—more so if I could receive a stipend to do so. I applied for the scholarship and was elated to find out I was successful!



So many facets of the event management industry suit me: I'm that person who loves to organise tasks, thrives with timelines and to-do lists, and derives what is probably an unhealthy amount of satisfaction from seeing a plan on paper come to fruition. In my previous role, I took on the responsibility to organise events voluntarily; now I am studying and working within the industry.

I have another semester remaining of my degree, and I've been fortunate enough to have already gained experience in the events and festivals sector. I'm currently the project lead on the Barossa Wine Show, which is Australia's biggest regional wine show; and I'm also the Festival Manager for the Adelaide Equestrian Festival.

Once again, it was my lecturers who nudged me towards applying for a role within the industry. I'm a keen horse-rider and I've adored equestrianism for as long as I can remember. My mum was a rider, and I began riding horses at the age of nine—which is, would you believe it, late in the equestrian world. I participated in Pony Club and was a mounted steward and competitor at the Royal Adelaide Show for over 10 years. Knowing this, my lecturer encouraged me to contact the Adelaide Equestrian Festival. The director of the festival was excited to hear from me, and I began as her assistant for two years. Now I have the manager role, which entails everything from email marketing to coordinating venues to customer administration.

Now that I'm near the completion of my studies, I'm reflecting on the different people I have met and the lifelong friendships that have been formed during my time at TAFE SA. My studies translate directly to my career: I don't consider it an exaggeration to say that every study unit has provided me with concrete skills that I can apply in my work. As I was fortunate enough to receive the Destination Australia Scholarship, I wanted to give back to TAFE SA. I decided to join Student Voice to contribute where I could, working in partnership with TAFE SA staff to provide input on services, facilities, and academic matters that enhance the student experience. This has been a rewarding experience: I've seen positive changes made due to the feedback that our Student Voice group has provided, and this has reinforced the power of collaboration and open exchange.



TAFE SA student Kate Growden is building experience in the events sector and is the project lead for the Barossa Wine Show

I feel lucky to be able to live, study, and work in my local community. I love my proximity to an abundance of open spaces and accessible nature, the fresh country air, and belonging to a tight-knit community – for all these reasons and more, I choose to live in Freeling. I find it special to walk down the street and bump into someone I've known since I was born. If you haven't visited the Barossa Valley yet, I would highly recommend you do so… and make sure you come with an appetite, because there are so many astounding places to eat and drink around here.

Thinking back, it was agricultural shows like the Gawler Show and the Royal Adelaide Show where my love for festivals and events really began. Knowing how much joy the shows brought me, I was drawn to organising events and festivals that bring communities together and increase the liveliness of our towns and cities. I'm so glad that when I was standing there at that crossroad, unsure which path I should take, I listened to my heart and my intuition. **It's never too late to change your career or learn something new.**



I FEEL LUCKY TO BE ABLE TO LIVE, STUDY AND WORK IN MY LOCAL COMMUNITY



IN PURSUIT OF SKILLS EXCELLENCE:

JEMMA'S PATH TO WORLDSKILLS

TAFE SA apprentice Jemma Glatz's thirst for knowledge and determination to keep improving her skills has propelled her into the public arena as a WorldSkills competitor and an advocate for vocational education and training.

The third-year apprentice, who is completing a Certificate III in Painting and Decorating (CPC30620) at TAFE SA's Tonsley Campus, has been selected as a member of the Skillaroos, Australia's WorldSkills team which will compete in China in September.

The Skillaroos features 37 of the country's best young apprentices and trainees who have starred at regional and national competitions across a range of trades.
TAFE SA graphic design graduate Emilie Flavel is also a member of the Skillaroos.

Jemma, 21, admits it's not what she envisaged when she signed up for an apprenticeship nearly three years ago but credits the WorldSkills competition with helping her develop a range of professional and personal skills.

"I was the most anxious person when I first came to TAFE SA. WorldSkills has given me a lot of experiences. I'm definitely more personable and it's helped my skills so I can produce better finishes, and I'm more confident in the work I produce," she says.

Jemma, who is employed by Maxima Group Training and hosted with the Adelaide City Council, first learnt about WorldSkills, a global organisation promoting skills excellence, when her TAFE SA lecturer Steve Baliga encouraged her to enter the 2024 regional event.

Impressed by her lecturer's enthusiasm for the competition, she decided to "just give it a go" and ended up placing second. Her high score saw her included in the South Australian team to compete in the WorldSkills National Championship in Brisbane in 2025 where she again scored silver, narrowly missing top spot.

Much to her delight she was invited to join the Skillaroos. In the lead up to September's international competition, she has taken part in a 'friendly' competition in China and the Global Skills Competition in NSW where she scored a gold medal.

"The Global Skills was a good learning experience and a confidence boost - it was good to see that all the training has helped," she says.

Jemma's meticulous preparation for both the national and international events has been supported by Maxima and the Adelaide City Council who have allowed extra time for training, and she has devoted hours of personal time inspired by learning all she can from her TAFE SA lecturer and mentor, Steve.

Steve is a strong advocate for WorldSkills. He has been involved in the competition since 2009 and is currently Australia's Chief Judge for painting and decorating. He was honoured to be an international judge at the 2024 WorldSkills competition in Lyon, France, and is looking forward to this year's event in Shanghai, China.

Part of his role as Chief Judge is to mentor Australia's entrant in the painting and decorating category and it's clear that he's thrilled with the commitment that Jemma has shown in developing her competition skills. As part of the skills test, she will need to demonstrate painting and wallpapering techniques, complete designs to exacting measurements and perfect colour matches all within a tight timeframe.

Keen to avoid a "desk job", Jemma made up her mind to pursue a trade career while attending Nazareth Catholic College. She enrolled in a Certificate II in Construction Pathways (CPC20220), spending one day a week at Western Technical College where TAFE SA lecturers taught tiling, bricklaying and carpentry. It piqued her interest in the construction industry and led her to a painting and decorating apprenticeship.

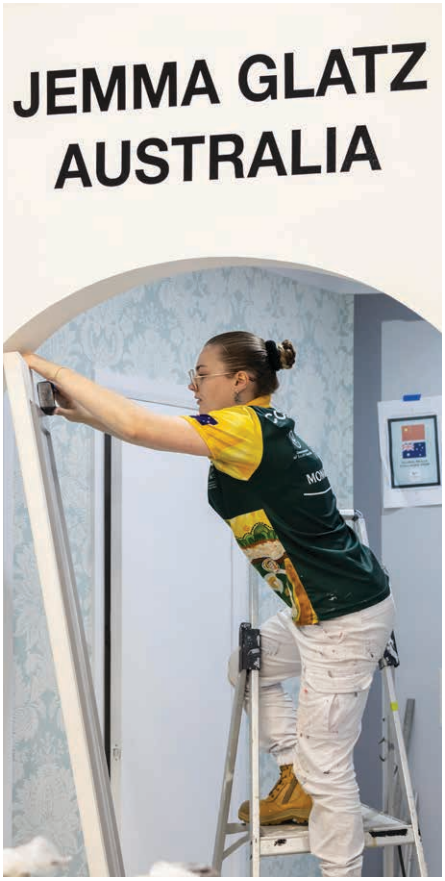


TAFE SA painting and decorating apprentice Jemma Glatz with TAFE SA lecturer and WorldSkills mentor Steve Baliga

Jemma is among a growing number of women who are taking up apprenticeships in traditionally male-dominated trades, bringing fresh perspectives and talents to the workplace. Over the past three years, TAFE SA has seen a 35 per cent increase in the number of women apprentices enrolled in construction trades training.

Jemma says WorldSkills has given her the opportunity to try different skills to those she uses on the job with the Adelaide City Council, where her work involves maintaining public amenities such as seating and picnic tables.

"A lot of people have said to me, 'Why are you doing WorldSkills, you don't really win anything', but I say, 'That's not the point'. The point is skills excellence. **The point is to better yourself, grow in yourself personally, not just develop your skills but expand your world and why wouldn't you say, 'Yes' to that."**



Jemma's preparation for WorldSkills included the Global Skills Challenge, where she was awarded the gold medal

BOWHILL ENGINEERING:



Bowhill Engineering staff with South Australian Premier, The Hon Peter Malinauskas MP

A WINNING FORMULA IN REGIONAL SOUTH AUSTRALIA

"APPRENTICES ARE THE FUTURE OF OUR INDUSTRY," SAYS JODIE HAWKES, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF BOWHILL ENGINEERING. "THE DEMAND FOR TRADES NOW IS EXTREMELY HIGH; THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT."

Proudly family-owned and South Australian, Bowhill Engineering specialises in the fabrication of large and complex steel structures, delivering major steel infrastructure projects across the country. The company employs 80+ staff including 15 TAFE SA apprentices who are all completing a Certificate III in Engineering (Fabrication) (MEM31925) at TAFE SA's Murray Bridge Campus.

"Apprentices are the future of our industry," says Jodie Hawkes, Chief Executive Officer of Bowhill Engineering. "The demand for trades now is extremely high; the future is bright."

"We work closely with TAFE SA to ensure apprentices are not just gaining skills but building confidence and pride in their trade too," Jodie explains.

The partnership is decades-long now: it began in 1990, when Jodie's husband, Jeremy Hawkes, was undertaking his Heavy Diesel Mechanic apprenticeship. Since then, Bowhill has trained over 56 apprentices, combining on-the-job learning with a strong technical foundation. Jodie is passionate about investing in early-career talent and considers it Bowhill's mission to nurture the workforce of their local community.

"Having 15 apprentices currently training with us is something we're really proud of, especially in a regional area. It's a shared commitment to developing capable, future-ready tradespeople."

"We see it as a responsibility to pass on knowledge, create opportunities and help young people thrive. When they succeed, our whole region benefits. We call it 'grow our own'. We don't always get to keep the talent we develop, but I'm sure we make a lasting impact on everyone who works with us."

Bowhill was recognised for its 'People First' approach to training, mentoring and career progression, winning the Small Employer of the Year Award at the 2025 Australian Training Awards. Jodie is keen to emphasise that the national honour reflected a team effort: everyone—from apprentices to tradespeople to leaders—has contributed to building Bowhill into what it is today.

"Winning the award was incredibly humbling and a moment of real pride for our whole team. The award recognised the effort that goes into creating a supportive, growth-focused workplace," Jodie reflects. "More than anything, it validated our belief that investing in people is the right thing to do. It felt like a win for regional businesses doing things differently."

Bowhill has strong roots in the region. It was started in the early 1970s as a rural machinery maintenance workshop by Brendon and Averil Hawkes. In the early 1990s, their two sons took over the family business and transitioned into steel fabrication and construction.

"What started as 12 staff has now evolved to 80 staff plus in 2026," Jodie explains. Though they work and build trusting relationships with clients across Australia, the business has remained firmly focused on its region and local community.

"From the beginning, a central tenet of our business was to help regional towns grow and stay connected. Over time, we've become part of the fabric of the Murraylands, contributing to projects that genuinely matter to people's everyday lives."

Jodie has been a member of the Regional Development Australia Murrayland and Riverlands (RDAMR) Board since 2018 and took on the role of Chair in 2021. She is driven to show young people that success can be achieved by staying and working within the region. Bowhill is investing in robotic welding, CNC machining, and augmented reality (Microsoft HoloLens) to future-proof both the business and the wider Murraylands. The quick uptake of the new technology has allowed the business to improve quality, efficiency, and safety while staying competitive on a national level.

"Importantly, it also creates opportunities for skilled jobs locally and shows that advanced manufacturing can thrive in regional Australia. We see it as building capability that benefits far beyond our own business," says Jodie. "There's so much untapped beauty and opportunity in the Murraylands, and I'd love to see more people—including migrants and those from the east coast—recognise that this can be a place to call home. Regional communities offer a sense of place that's hard to replicate elsewhere."

Speaking to Jodie, it is clear she adores both her local community and the opportunities that advanced manufacturing can offer to the regional workforce. Jodie is adamant that Australian manufacturing in the regions can be advanced, automated, and skills-focused, helping to build sovereign capability. She sees the Murraylands as having the right set of conditions for this new future of manufacturing: "Here it's community over competition, shared wins, and knowing you're part of something bigger than yourself," she affirms. Asked what she loves about living and working in Bowhill, Jodie is quick to enumerate a long list of reasons, including the palpable sense of community spirit and the natural environment, particularly the river, which she says brings her a sense of calm and connection that's hard to put into words. **"Honestly, there's nowhere else I'd rather be."**



Bowhill Engineering CEO Jodie Hawkes and HR Manager Samantha Krollig accept the Small Employer of the Year Award at the 2025 Australian Training Awards

"...REGIONAL COMMUNITIES OFFER A SENSE OF PLACE THAT'S HARD TO REPLICATE ELSEWHERE."



Bowhill Engineering, Murraylands



Bowhill Engineering specialises in the fabrication of large and complex steel structures

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?





SPOTLIGHT ON AWARD-WINNING ARTIST AND TAFE SA GRADUATE EMMALINE ZANELLI

Emmaline Zanelli always knew she wanted to attend art school. Studying visual art had been a dream of hers since she could remember, and in a way, she was forging a path for herself that had been denied to her mum a generation earlier.

"My parents were always supportive of my decision to study art, particularly my mum," Emmaline reflects. "Mum had always wanted to go to art school, but her dad wouldn't allow it, so she studied marketing instead. She encouraged me to stay true to what I wanted for my future."

After graduating from high school at age 17, Emmaline carefully considered the advantages of the various tertiary visual arts programs available to her. She knew she wanted a structured learning style with plenty of opportunity for in-person guidance. "I chose to study at TAFE SA because of the high contact hours: you need to be in class for much of the week and the class sizes are small, which was appealing to me as it seemed more manageable than trying to navigate the kind of self-directed learning that is more common at university," she explains.



Magic Cave, installation view



I take care of what's mine, production still, 2024

Now nationally acclaimed for her lens-based practice, while studying Emmaline experimented with a variety of media and found it challenging to select a major.

"I was struggling to find the discipline I wanted to focus my energy on, and so my photography lecturer, Sofia Calado, said to me: why don't you choose photography? You can continue to work across mediums and then photograph your work. That advice really stuck with me and has helped to shape my practice ever since."

"I now use that framework when I'm leading my own workshops with school students—we work on a project for a few weeks, and that project can have endless possibilities. The outcome often becomes the photography and video of the diverse work that is produced."

Emmaline graduated from the Bachelor of Visual Arts (UNIFL0003), a dual degree with TAFE SA and Flinders University, in 2015, and her career has been in ascension ever since. She's gained a national profile through prestigious achievements, including winning the $15,000 Churchie Emerging Art Prize in 2022 and being part of the three-member team which won the $60,000 Adelaide Film Festival/Samstag Museum Expand Moving Image Commission in 2024. She was selected as one of five early-career Australian artists for the Primavera 2025 exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Gadigal land/Sydney), and most recently, she was one of 24 Australian artists included by curator Ellie Buttrose in the 2026 Adelaide Biennial Yield Strength.



Emmaline had first met Buttrose during her residency at Adelaide Contemporary Experimental (ACE), where she had been a recipient of their studio residency program. Buttrose was a visiting curator and came to see Emmaline in her studio. “I wasn’t sure if anything would result from the studio visit, but then in January last year, Ellie asked me for a Zoom meeting,” Emmaline explains. “She said she’d like to hear what I was working on.”

That meeting became a commission: Emmaline spoke to Buttrose about various ideas for her next project, and Buttrose in turn asked if she wanted to realise one of those ideas for the 2026 Biennial. “The Adelaide Biennial feels like the height of opportunity in South Australia,” Emmaline says, “so I felt a lot of pressure when making the work! It was a wonderful feeling when I finally put it out in the world and received positive feedback from audiences.”

Her 15-minute video work for the Biennial, Pocket Money, follows diverse young people working in casual or part-time employment, navigating their relationships to paid labour, consumption, and after-school hobbies. Across the opening and ending scenes, a mythic narrative is woven that finds ‘moth’, a sparkling abattoir glove, searching for ‘coin’. It is an imaginative and playful look into an experience that formats young adulthood and kickstarts a period of intense interpersonal growth.

“AS I WAS STRUGGLING TO FIND A DISCIPLINE TO FOCUS MY ENERGY ON, MY PHOTOGRAPHY LECTURER, SOFIA CALADO, SAID TO ME: WHY DON’T YOU CHOOSE PHOTOGRAPHY? YOU CAN CONTINUE TO WORK ACROSS MEDIUMS AND THEN PHOTOGRAPH YOUR WORK. THAT ADVICE REALLY STUCK WITH ME AND HAS HELPED TO SHAPE MY PRACTICE EVER SINCE.”

Emmaline's practice is marked by this great sensitivity to the vicissitudes of age, place, and social context, which means her work responds intimately to facets of life that are often overlooked or under-examined. While much of her work has involved photography and videography, one of her pieces for Primavera 2025 was a vast sculptural installation, Magic Cave. It consisted of a large network of second-hand mouse cages and colourful, transparent mouse tunnels; it was her fantastical interpretation of life underground inspired by visits to Roxby Downs and BHP's Olympic Dam mine.

The installation has just been delivered back to her and now needs to be unpacked and stored. Unlike a video on a simple USB, the storage solutions for installation works are much more onerous. She jokes that this is why she prefers digital media—and then also notes that she is currently contending with an evasive mouse in the house, and so perhaps, the installation can come in handy. "For months and months, my partner and I have been trying to catch this mouse in our house. We had this dream of building a 'Mouse Disneyland' that this mouse could live in. Now I have two pallets of colourful mouse cages sent back to me from the MCA..."

After graduating, Emmaline says that she began her career by focusing on building an artistic community and learning from like-minded peers. She would advise visual arts graduates to consider a similar approach: "Don't focus too heavily on applying for exhibition or residency opportunities immediately, they will come as your practice matures. Take the time to scope out your niche and work out how you can become part of the local arts ecology."

"I gained so much from visiting artists' studios," she continues. "I also met some incredible artists through having my own studio, including people who were to become some of my closest friends. I've really benefited from being part of a local arts community, and many opportunities have arisen from that network. Don't think of yourself as an island. **You're not an island. No one can afford to be an island in this economy!"**



I take care of what's mine, production still, 2024



Award-winning visual artist Emmaline Zanelli with her video work Pocket Money which was exhibited at the 2026 Adelaide Biennial

MEET THE LECTURER:



ANNE TONKIN

Anne Tonkin is a Business and Management Lecturer at TAFE SA and passionate disability advocate

Anne Tonkin has devoted nearly three decades to education. For the past 24 years, she has taught Business and Management at TAFE SA. Her impressive tenure reflects her sincere love for the profession: she speaks animatedly about how different pedagogies can be deployed to sustain students' attention, and the privilege it is to teach people from all walks of life on an everyday basis.

"I think most lecturers are in the classroom to change lives," she says. "Do you know what I love the most about teaching? I love giving hope and passion to a student who perhaps didn't believe they would have the skills to complete their studies. I love to encourage my students—sometimes it's just a boost of confidence and self-belief that is needed."

Her classroom is full of students with diverse life experiences: "From young people who have just finished secondary school, to mums fleeing domestic violence situations, to newly arrived migrants or managers who need to boost their skills."

Last year, Anne taught a student who had recently arrived in Australia as a refugee, after having spent a significant period of time living in a refugee camp in Pakistan. "When he started the Diploma, he didn't have very many technical skills," she recounts. "The lecturing staff helped him as much as they could to successfully complete his course. He's now at university and says he wouldn't be there if it wasn't for the support of the lecturers in the program."

In addition to a Bachelor of Business from the University of South Australia and a Master of Teaching from Curtin University, Anne has completed seven Diplomas or Certificates at TAFE SA – in the fields of Business, Marketing, Training and Assessment, Sustainability, Business Administration, and Project Management. "I've been studying for about 20 years as a lecturer to keep my knowledge at the forefront," she says.

Over the decades, Anne has seen how new technology has impacted and changed the profession, first with the advent of online learning, and now with the challenges and opportunities afforded to us by artificial intelligence. "Education itself hasn't changed too much, but the strategies and techniques in engaging students have been greatly enhanced," Anne explains. "We need to create content that is really interesting and exciting, so that pushes us to enhance and renew our approaches. The quality is still what is the backbone of successful delivery for students."

Against the backdrop of a thriving career in education, Anne has navigated difficult personal circumstances to become "an accidental advocate". About 18 years ago, when she had just transitioned from a casual to a full-time lecturer role at TAFE SA, her husband was diagnosed with a rare muscle disease. "I was raising two young boys, and I had just lost my father, who was my hero," Anne reflects on that period. "When we learned of the diagnosis, I also became my husband's carer."

Anne's husband, David, passed away in January this year, after his condition had begun to severely decline over the past 12 months. As her husband's illness deteriorated, she says her three worlds—as a lecturer, a carer, and a final-year Master's student—"collided", inspiring her to write the Tonkin 10/10 Bill.

"I THINK MOST LECTURERS ARE IN THE CLASSROOM TO CHANGE LIVES"

The Tonkin 10/10 Bill is a landmark piece of proposed legislation introducing clear benchmarks for accessibility. “It’s written to be the first Bill incorporating community inclusion metrics in the world. What it refers to is that 21 percent of the Australian population lives with disability — roughly half are visible disabilities, some of which may require a wheelchair, and the rest are invisible and therefore can go unnoticed by the general public.”

As Anne explains it, the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) provides for ‘reasonable adjustments’ to support accessibility, however this definition is open to broad interpretation: “Organisations really struggle to address what ‘reasonable allowance’ is, so this Bill replaces that language with clear metrics. It doesn’t necessarily mean huge infrastructure changes or major expenditure. It’s redesigning the ticketing of spaces, providing more disability access in car parks, and other modifications that don’t cost very much.”

Anne recalls having to walk with her husband for four and a half kilometres in a wheelchair because there was no access transport available. She recounts the story of a friend who had to undertake ‘reconnaissance missions’ to ensure a festival was truly accessible — because the understanding of accessibility is so uneven across venues and needs differ greatly amongst the population. Her advocacy, which she likes to joke that she fell into by complete chance, is driven by these tough personal experiences.

“Going into the community is highly beneficial for your mental health,” Anne reminds us. “Accessing the community is a basic human right, but the current systems we have in place do not allow for 21 percent of the population to access the community in the way that an able-bodied person can.”

As she was studying a unit on access and diversity as part of her postgraduate qualification, Anne was also teaching sustainability. Her life as a carer had imbued her with tangible, sometimes heartbreaking, insights and lived experience.

All three facets of her life came together to inspire her to draft a Bill that could make a positive impact on people living with disability, their family, and friends.

“This wouldn’t have been written if I wasn’t a lecturer. It wouldn’t have been written if I wasn’t a carer for 17 years, and it wouldn’t have been written if I wasn’t studying my Master’s. I gained knowledge and skills from all of these experiences and decided to utilise what I had learned to advocate for change.”

Anne has presented the Tonkin 10/10 Bill to a Member of Parliament, as well as to councils across the state.

As for what the future holds, Anne will continue doing what she loves — teaching her students at TAFE SA and organising for disability rights. She is setting up a foundation for disability advocacy and has ambitions to scale her work at a global level. **“The last year has been the toughest of my life, but it has also been rewarding to see the changes that are taking place,” she says.**

“...I GAINED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FROM ALL OF THESE EXPERIENCES AND DECIDED TO UTILISE WHAT I HAD LEARNED TO ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE.”



BALANCE THE SCALES:
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY AT TAFE SA

In celebration of International Women's Day on 8 March, TAFE SA brought together three remarkable women for a panel discussion exploring this year's theme, 'Balance the Scales.' Drawing on their diverse experiences in education and community leadership, the panellists shared their perspectives on both the opportunities and the challenges women continue to navigate in their careers and lives.

The discussion featured Katrina Parker, TAFE SA Auslan Programs Coordinator and Lecturer; Sahar Khajani, TAFE SA Foundation Skills Lecturer in the Adult Migrant English Program; and Shahy Radwan, TAFE SA graduate and recipient of the 2025 Enriching Communities Award at the TAFE SA Honour Awards.

What follows is an abridged transcript of their conversation.

What does 'Balance the Scales' mean to you?

Katrina Parker: Last Sunday, we celebrated International Deaf Women's Day as part of International Deaf Women's Week, which was marked by events and discussions around the world.

People from Australia and overseas came together online through Facebook and other groups, including participants from countries such as Germany and the United States. We shared our experiences, challenges and concerns, and discussed the issues affecting women and girls today, as well as what the future might hold.

One of the things that stood out was the diversity of sign languages represented. Sign language is not universal, so we used International Sign to communicate with one another. Women from a wide range of backgrounds participated, including women from Iran, and it was valuable to hear their perspectives and experiences.

The discussions highlighted both positive developments and ongoing challenges. They reinforced the importance of supporting one another, building connections and empowering deaf women around the world. We also recognised the experiences of hearing women and CODAs—Children of Deaf Adults—whose lives are closely connected to the deaf community.

For me, it was particularly meaningful to see International Women's Day and International Deaf Women's Day linked in this way. It helped raise awareness of the experiences of deaf women globally and the importance of continuing to support and advocate for one another.

Shahy Radwan: For me, balancing the scales has been the secret to how I've worked, lived and found my place in the Australian community. In my first few years here, I was trying to do too many things at once. I was running in every direction. Later, I realised that maintaining balance was what would actually help me get where I wanted to be.

At first, I thought balance meant giving everything equal attention. But over time, I reassessed that idea and realised balance isn't about making everything equal. It's about understanding what matters most at a particular time and how important a goal is to you.

Sahar Khajani: To me, 'Balance the Scales' represents our ongoing efforts to create equity for women and girls through equal opportunities, safety, and inclusion. It doesn't matter what someone's background or identity is; what matters is ensuring that every voice is valued and heard, and that we continue to challenge social, cultural, and systemic barriers. In Australia, language barriers can also be a significant challenge.

My own experience has reinforced the importance of mentorship, women's advocacy, and access to education. These are the tools that help women and girls build confidence, develop a sense of agency, and achieve their goals. That's what 'Balancing the Scales' looks like to me.

Katrina, what would you like people to know about your experience as an Auslan lecturer at TAFE SA and the experience of your students?

I've been at TAFE for more than 30 years and, during that time, I've seen significant change and progress, particularly for women like me working as lecturers.

Access to interpreters wasn't always guaranteed. If an interpreter wasn't available, we relied on handwritten notes or typed communication. At that time, many managers had limited understanding of sign language, and email was only just becoming more widely used across the TAFE sector.

Throughout my career, I've taught many women and girls from a wide range of backgrounds. Not only have there been Australian students learning Auslan, but also people from overseas who have come to Australia and learned Auslan as an additional language. This has included refugees and migrants, as well as parents who wanted to communicate more effectively with their deaf children.

Many students have shared personal challenges with us. Some were experiencing grief or distress related to events unfolding in their home countries. Others faced difficulties within their families or struggled to access support. Our role was to help connect them with services, create opportunities for participation, and provide access to supportive deaf communities.

Looking back, I've seen TAFE SA become increasingly focused on inclusion. There is now much greater recognition of the importance of accessibility, whether that's through interpreting services, captioned videos, or support for students and staff with additional disabilities. Auslan is now recognised as one of Australia's community languages, and there continues to be important work towards achieving formal recognition similar to that seen in other countries.

Within the classroom, I've witnessed enormous change. One thing that has remained constant is people's desire to learn Auslan. For many women and girls, learning the language is about communication, connection, and being able to engage more fully with the deaf community, both in their workplaces and in wider society.

Sahar, how do you challenge stereotypes in your everyday life?

Sahar Khajani: As an Iranian woman and a migrant, I'm often aware that people can come with preconceived ideas and stereotypes about who I am and what my background means.

Many stereotypes portray women from the Middle East as passive or as having limited opportunities and agency. I've encountered those assumptions many times throughout my life in Australia, and I think similar experiences happen to women around the world.

People have often asked why I don't wear a headscarf because I'm from Iran, or expressed surprise that I can drive, dress the way I do, or live independently. In some cases, these assumptions go even further, with people questioning my abilities or undervaluing my skills.

These experiences often come from a lack of understanding about different cultures and the diverse experiences of migrant women. The reality is that many migrant women are highly educated, proactive, confident decision-makers who bring valuable skills, knowledge, and experience to their communities and workplaces. At the same time, migration can affect confidence, and it often takes time to rebuild that confidence in a new country.

For me, challenging stereotypes happens every day. It happens through leadership, education, and visibility in public life. By founding a cultural centre, working in education and participating in community discussions, I want to demonstrate that migrant women are active contributors, leaders, and agents of change. Sometimes simply being present and speaking up can challenge assumptions.



Katrina Parker



Sahar Khajani



Shahy Radwan

Shahy, how do migrant women overcome barriers in employment?

Shahy Radwan: I came to this country as a skilled migrant woman. Many of us find ourselves caught in a cycle between needing local experience and trying to secure our first job—how do you get the first job without local experience? My husband and I both went through this challenge.

I later enrolled in a TAFE SA Multicultural Women's Program. We were a group of women from different backgrounds learning leadership skills. It made a huge difference for me—gaining access to information, resources, and the opportunity to speak with other women from different cultures and experiences.

Being in that space made me feel stronger. It reminded me that it doesn't matter where you begin—what matters is that you keep learning, keep seeking information, and keep sharing experiences. That always helps.

Another important thing I learned is how TAFE SA supports this process. Like many migrant women, I used to feel I had to prove myself every day—to prove who I am, defend my faith, and explain my cultural background. After my experience at TAFE SA, I realised that this wasn't the most effective approach. People need education and awareness. It shouldn't be my responsibility alone to constantly explain; instead, broader understanding needs to be built.



The Right Honourable The Lord Mayor of Adelaide, Dr Jane Lomax-Smith AM with Shahy Radwan, winner of the Enriching Communities Award at the TAFE SA Honour Awards 2025

TAFE SA plays an important role in this, particularly for people who may not access university or complete formal schooling. It provides pathways, support, and opportunities to build understanding. It is not just about saying, "These multicultural communities are good, give them a chance." It is about broadening perspectives, encouraging people to think carefully, seek information and build a more accurate understanding of others.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE:





The Centre for Excellence in Early Childhood Education and Care is focused on research, innovation and workforce development to enhance the sector



TAFE SA'S CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Evidence shows that the early years of a child's life can significantly determine their long-term development. Although quality schooling is important, the years before school are pivotal in shaping a child's future trajectory: the science tells us that quality early learning experiences can help children to develop the foundational skills necessary for more positive life outcomes.

"INVESTMENT IN THE EARLY YEARS PAYS THE BIGGEST DIVIDENDS"

In October 2022, a Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care in South Australia was launched, led by the Honourable Julia Gillard AC. In her final report, Ms Gillard AC set out 43 recommendations for the sector and emphasised that "investment in the early years pays the biggest dividends".

The need for change in the sector was clear. Data from the national Australian Early Development Census showed that South Australian children were experiencing a concerning level of developmental vulnerability, prompting the South Australian Government to commit to an ambitious 20-year goal of reducing the rate from the current 23.8 per cent to 15 per cent, as per Recommendation 1 of the Royal Commission. Achieving that target would require comprehensive and targeted action.

In July 2024, the federal and state governments jointly invested $28 million over five years to launch the Centre of Excellence in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) at TAFE SA. The establishment of the Centre was a recognition of the value of a skilled and well-supported workforce in helping all children thrive.

Based at the Adelaide city campus, the Centre serves as a hub for research, innovation and workforce development. Our staff collaborate with educators, universities, sector stakeholders and peak bodies in Early Childhood to design training that reflects the needs of a diverse sector. Since its establishment, the Centre has delivered accredited curriculum, learning resources and training solutions that respond to key sector challenges.

Among its growing body of work are projects that tackle specific knowledge gaps and barriers to inclusion. One of the Centre's recent major projects was the development of a professional development product designed to strengthen educators' understanding of autism to support their work with children and their families. The short course, Introduction to Autism for Early Childhood Educators, is now delivered to students enrolled in TAFE SA's Certificate lll in Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC30125) program.

The Centre worked closely with members of TAFE SA's Autism Advisory Group to shape curriculum. The Advisory Group highlighted a strong demand for early childhood focused professional development in neurodiversity and autism, as well as the importance of building educators' confidence in observing and responding to children's individual learning needs. The result is a professional learning product that equips educators with up-to-date knowledge and practical tools, including an understanding of common autistic characteristics, how to identify and implement evidence-based strategies, and how to plan effectively to support autistic children. It offers educators additional ways of supporting children with communication, social interaction, emotional and sensory regulation, and play-based learning.

Another current project is exploring how vocational education can be made more accessible and relevant for Anangu learners in the APY Lands. Working in partnership with community members, Centre staff have translated key Education and Care concepts into Pitjantjatjara and developed a glossary of terms to support learning where direct translations do not exist. The work recognises that effective learning resources need to reflect local contexts and languages.

Drawing on the ‘8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning’ framework, the project has applied Aboriginal perspectives and learning techniques to the curriculum, in ongoing consultation with APY Lands communities. It is hoped that the project will provide a practical roadmap for similar work: the Centre is documenting the methodology and broader learnings to help inform initiatives elsewhere.

At the core of the Centre’s mission is the understanding that improving outcomes for children begins with strengthening the capabilities of early childhood educators. Through projects led by dedicated staff, the Centre enhances educator knowledge in key areas using evidence-based practice. In doing so, **the Centre of Excellence in Early Childhood Education and Care is actively contributing to a more equitable future for all Australian children.**



Children’s Education and Care studies at TAFE SA



The Centre of Excellence develops learning resources to support early childhood educators. Sarbrinder Gill, pictured, is an early childhood worker at Kalaya Children’s Centre

COMMUNITY-LED EDUCATION:



TAFE SA'S ABORIGINAL ACCESS CENTRE

Marg Mibus, Director of TAFE SA's Aboriginal Access Centre, believes in the power of education to strengthen communities

For 18 years, Marg Mibus has led TAFE SA's Aboriginal Access Centre (AAC). As Director, she oversees the delivery of specialised support and tailored training programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across South Australia. "I have a fantastic team and a lot of us have been here for a very long time," Marg says. "We're like a family and we look after each other. Our collective focus is community and Aboriginal student success."

The AAC is a cornerstone of TAFE SA's support for First Nations learners. Alongside training programs, the AAC provides one-on-one support throughout a student's educational journey, facilitating strong completion rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Much of the Centre's work is shaped directly by community demand. "About 80 per cent of what we do is demand-driven," Marg explains. "That means responding to what communities need, whether that's accredited training, pre-employment programs, short courses or skillsets."

"WHEN YOU SEE FORMER STUDENTS THRIVING IN THEIR CAREERS, THAT'S WHAT KEEPS ME HERE"

Marg's commitment to education is rooted in her family history. As the granddaughter and daughter of two generations of the Stolen Generations, and the mother of three adult children, she holds a firm belief in the power of education to strengthen communities and challenge harmful dominant narratives. After nearly two decades of leading the AAC, it is the long-term impact of the work that continues to motivate her. She recalls a nursing program delivered in Port Lincoln more than a decade ago: "I walked into a coffee shop in Port Lincoln recently and a fellow customer smiled at me and asked if I recognised her. She had completed our nursing program and was still working as a nurse in the community."

"When you see former students thriving in their careers, that's what keeps me here," she says. "Then there are the young fellas who come through our pre-employment programs and go on to secure long-term employment. Seeing those outcomes and knowing you've played a small part in someone's journey is an incredibly rewarding feeling."



Nicole Lopez, Training Support Office, Aboriginal Access Centre

Recently, the AAC delivered a presentation on TAFE SA's Certificate III in Conservation and Ecosystem Management (AHC31424) to more than 200 Aboriginal rangers from across South Australia. A feedback session was organised to consult on new developments that the rangers and industry would like to see embedded into the course in the future. This feedback will shape the delivery of the course. When asked who had trained with TAFE SA, two-thirds of the rangers present raised their hands.

This form of community outreach is familiar territory to the AAC, whose work often extends to knowledge-sharing and collaboration initiatives to strengthen outcomes for First Nations people. On the far west coast, in the community of Scotdesco, TAFE SA's AAC lecturer in Regional and Remote Hospitality, Clayle Henning, recently worked with women from the local community to cater for the Jawun conference. Jawun brings together corporate, government, and philanthropic organisations with local First Nations communities to support skills exchange and community enterprises.

Clayle worked with local women to cook and deliver a four-course meal for 40 participants attending the conference.

For Marg, these initiatives are all guided by a set of common principles: listening to communities, responding to their needs, and facilitating their aspirations. Over the years, this approach has shaped the AAC's support services and programs, and nurtured long-term relationships with communities across our state. "The relationships you create with community are long lasting, I still have them," Marg says. "They're very special." **When asked whether her time at the AAC has passed quickly, Marg laughs. "When I look in the mirror, it certainly feels like it has!"**



Mick Davison, Aboriginal Education Partnership Advisor, Aboriginal Access Centre



Jake Hanson,
Casual Administrative Services Officer,
Aboriginal Access Centre



Cover image:
Callan McKenzie, TAFE SA graduate, Connekt Plumbing
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