



Country  
Universities  
Centre  
CAPE YORK

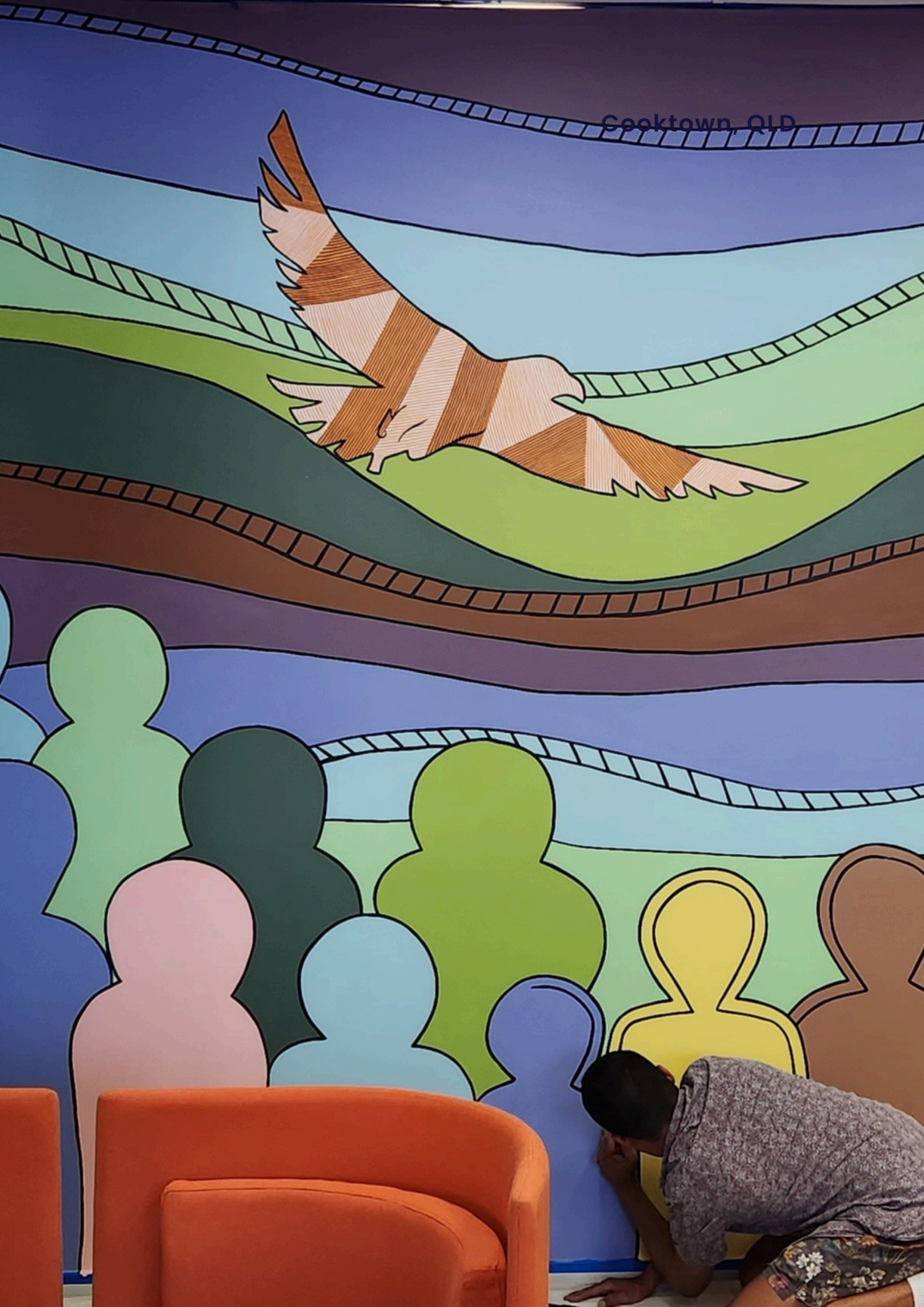


# ANNUAL REPORT

# 2024



Cooktown, QLD



**We acknowledge the country our  
centre is located on and our  
respects to the Guugu Yimithirr,  
Kuku Yalanji, Kuku Nyungul and  
Jalunji people, the Traditional  
Owners and custodians of our  
region in Far North Queensland. We  
extend this respect to their Elders  
past and present as well as our  
emerging leaders.**



**“Our mission is to support students to succeed, widen access to higher education for regional, rural, and remote communities; and to change higher education to better fit regional Australia.”**

**CHRIS RONAN**

CUC Chief Executive Officer





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# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



**Marilyn  
Morris**

**My happy place is driving by the Centre after dark and seeing the lights on – knowing there are people within, educating themselves in their own backyard. This makes me smile!!!**

CUC Cape York continues the journey into its second year of operation under the guidance of an extremely competent team. They work together, bringing educational opportunities to Cooktown and surrounding small townships and communities. I would like to express my appreciation to Jenni, Kerry and Tiannie – also from the students in the community, many of whom approach me with gratitude for this Centre and the staff.

I would like to mention a highlight for me from 2024. The CUC team participated in the State School Careers Expo in October, along with many other organisations invested in career pathways for our senior students. I was helping at another stall, which gave me the opportunity to view from a distance. I watched the CUC team engaging students in good conversation, holding their attention and focus. This is no mean feat.... when you have over twenty other stalls with merch!!! It was a light bulb moment – watching the young faces as they visualised the possibility of furthering their education on home turf.

I was wondering if possibly I was just being dreamy – however I've just heard that one of those students also had a light bulb moment!! She didn't know where to from here, then suddenly applied to University (with the Principals letter of support), and has now been accepted and will study at CUC in 2025. She will be a phenomenal Primary Teacher.

During 2024, CUC Cape York have created new networks within the regional footprint of Cook Shire and Cape York Peninsula. This expansion sees the Centre reaching into outlying areas and growing education within our whole region. I look forward to 2025 and thank the Board, CUC Central and our sponsors.





# CENTRE MANAGERS REPORT



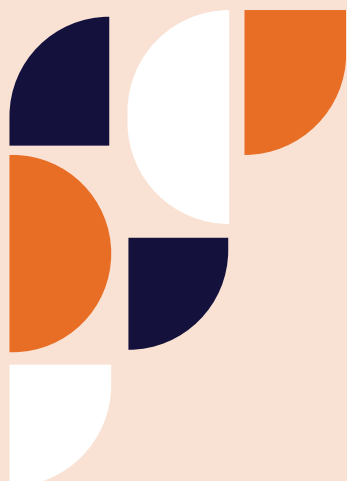
**Jenni  
James**

**It brings me so much joy to hear from a student that our CUC has had a positive impact on their studies. Seeing them overcome challenges and complete their studies is both rewarding and truly inspiring!**

It has been both a challenge and a delight to lead at the helm of CUC Cape York in its first full year of providing services to our local student population. The first semester of 2024 saw us reach unexpected heights with 86 student registrations. This is almost double our projected student numbers for our second year of operation. It is the ongoing support and enthusiasm of our beautiful community and emerging partnerships that has seen the CUC exceed these expectations and I thank everyone who has supported us during this time.

The end of 2023 and start of 2024 was not without its challenges for our centre, our staff and our students when cyclone Jasper delivered record breaking rainfall to our region. This caused a natural disaster which produced unprecedented flooding. Many homes and businesses were damaged as a result of this including the CUC and the homes of our students and staff. While it was one of the most difficult times our region has faced, the support of local people, emergency services, Council and the State and Federal Governments has seen our communities bounce back with ongoing infrastructure repairs as well economic and social supports.

We welcomed our Student Support and Outreach Coordinator, Kerry Clough to the team during this challenging time and I commend her for her willingness to assist with tasks outside of her role including helping with businesses and individuals who had been affected by the floods.



Part of Kerry's role has been to design and implement the Cape Country Careers program which is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education under the Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP). This widening participation program provides activities that stimulate engagement with education and provides information and guidance for community members of the Cape York Peninsula to investigate and participate in further education. We look forward to delivering this program throughout the region during 2024-25.





# OUR STORY

The Country Universities Centre's origins were in the establishment of the Cooma Universities Centre in 2013, designed to provide improved supported higher educational opportunities in that town of approximately 7,000 people.

## WHAT WE DO

CUC Cape York is a dedicated learning and study space that supports any student, studying any course online. Students can connect with like-minded people and engage in a learning community while they study locally. We are focused on supporting the academic success of students and ensuring they have the tools to succeed in their higher education journey.



**Name**

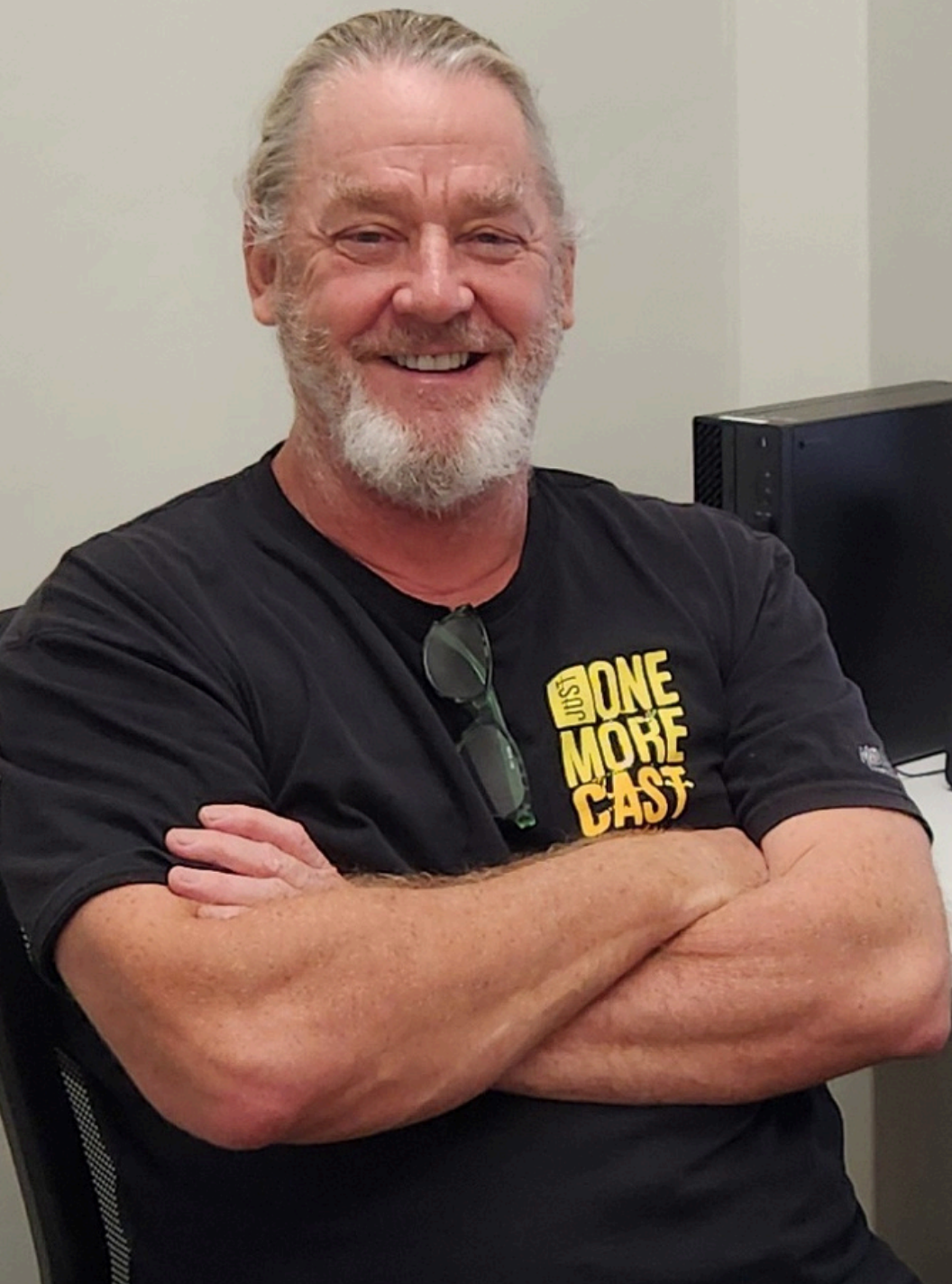
**Christopher Veal**

**Degree**

**Preliminary Thesis  
Project**

**University**

**University of Southern  
Queensland**





# PARTNERSHIPS

## Government & Community Partnerships

Essential to the success of the CUC has been the support of our partners, including the Commonwealth Government, university partners, local government, and community partners.

### The Australian Government

The Australian Government is investing more than \$74 million to assist in the establishment and operation of community-owned, Regional University Centres at sites across regional Australia. CUC is a successful recipient of the Commonwealth's Regional University Centres Program and gratefully acknowledges the support received to date.

### Foundation for Regional Rural and Renewal (FRRR)

The FRRR is supporting the CUC through its not-for-profit fundraising account.

### Cook Shire Council

The Cook Shire Council is a founding partner of CUC Cape York, providing both financial and in-kind support to ensure the establishment and progression of this important service.



# PARTNERSHIPS

## University Partnerships

The CUC has partnerships with the following universities:



### University of Technology Sydney (UTS)

UTS have partnered with the CUC to develop the Regional Partnerships Project Pool Program (RPPPP). This program brings together 19 universities and 16 Regional University Centres to design tailored school outreach programmes for the local community.

### James Cook University (JCU)

JCU have partnered with CUC Cape York to deliver the RPPPP program throughout Cape York Peninsula, supporting outreach in remote communities through our Widening Participation Program, Cape Country Careers.

### Central Queensland University (CQU)

CQU have partnered with CUC Cape York to deliver the RPPPP program throughout Cape York Peninsula, supporting outreach in remote communities through our Widening Participation Program, Cape Country Careers.

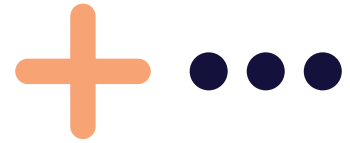
### University of Queensland (UQ)

UQ have partnered with CUC Cape York to deliver the RPPPP program throughout Cape York Peninsula, supporting outreach in remote communities through our Widening Participation Program, Cape Country Careers, particularly in the areas of training and development as well as evaluation of the program.





# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



## OUR COMMUNITY ARE OUR BIGGEST SUPPORTERS.

The Centre has engaged with local industry, schools, and organisations. The success of this Centre depends on the support from our local community.

### Community Engagement

Our Centre has hosted a number of community engagement events and activities including a morning tea for the 60's and Better program, hosting the Cook Shire Youth Council meetings and providing a space for Mental Health First Aid training.

Staff have participated in events including NAIDOC and the Cooktown Discovery Festival as well as attending community meetings, events and markets in Cook Shire, Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal.

### School Engagement

School engagement is increasing with the launch of the RPPPP program and has included visits from high schools in the Cooktown area to the CUC for both students and teachers. Staff have also attended Careers Expos in both Cooktown and Weipa and Year 12 graduation ceremonies at Cooktown high schools.

Students from Year 10 and up are able to access the Centre to support their studies with under 18's able to use the Centre while it is supervised between 8am and 5pm. This includes students who are accessing distance education.

### Industry Engagement

During the start of 2024 CUC Cape York recognised the need to support local small businesses to complete grant applications for disaster relief assistance. This led to a new partnership with the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) and enabled many small businesses to access support from DESBT at the CUC during regular pop-up visits. The Centre was also utilised for local government training as new Councilors were welcomed to the region.



# STUDENT SUPPORT

## HERE FOR OUR STUDENTS

With the support of their local CUC regional, rural and remote students can follow their dreams when it comes to study. The CUC has responded to student needs and created an innovative model that allows choice by supporting any student, studying any course, at any Australian Tertiary Education Provider.

The wrap-around model of student support provides face-to-face academic, wellbeing, technology and administrative support in a learning community, in addition to what each student's learning institution already provides. These extra layers of support are crucial for many students who study with the CUC.

Regional online students are often at greater risk of attrition. Many students are from low Socioeconomic Status (SES) backgrounds, are the first in their family to attend university, or have caring responsibilities and multiple other commitments. The CUC offers a free, safe and welcoming environment to study with flexible and personalised, face-to-face support. The CUC understands that students are individuals and provides supports accordingly so that we meet students where they are in their education journey.

CUC Cape York exemplifies this model by deeply engaging with the communities of the Cape York Peninsula. Their tailored support and community-driven initiatives have significantly improved educational outcomes, providing a nurturing environment for students to thrive.

# STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2024

## KEY FINDINGS

97%

of students felt  
safe and  
welcomed at  
their CUC



94%

said the CUC helps  
improve their  
academic  
performance



88%

said the presence of  
a CUC contributed to  
their wellbeing



**“Dedicated  
study areas”**  
was the main reason  
students attended  
their local CUC



*CUC provided a tremendous,  
supportive space and tools to  
empower my potential to succeed,  
crucial to complete my Bachelor of  
Nursing Science Degree.*



Pearl Modric  
Bachelor of Nursing Science



*I encourage all people that I come  
across in my workplace and social life  
to visit the CUC in Cooktown and be  
impressed with the services that are  
free and available to anyone studying*



Christopher Veal  
Preliminary Thesis



96%

said the presence of a  
CUC makes it easier for  
me to stay, study or  
work in my community



# HIGHLIGHTS OF 2024

## Highlight 1

On July 10, we celebrated our Centre's first birthday with champagne and canapés. Heartfelt speeches showcased the Centre's accomplishments and community impact, marking a successful year and setting the stage for future achievements and memories.

## Highlight 2

In June, CUC Central and CUC Cape York hosted leaders from government, universities, and the vocational sector to explore the transformative power of the community-led model of the CUC. Attendees were provided an opportunity to visit Hope Vale as part of the study tour and learn about their culture first hand from local elders.

## Highlight 3

The CUC Network attended the RUSH Symposium and National Conference in Coffs Harbour, where staff collaborated with the Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH) network, universities, VET, and schools to discuss "Growth Through Equity."

## Highlight 4

The launch of the RPPPP program, Cape Country Careers, saw Year 10 students visit the CUC to use Virtual Reality (VR) equipment to explore career options and pathways in a new format. Feedback was positive from both the students and teachers involved.

# 2024 YEAR IN REVIEW

## A TIME FOR RECOVERY

Following a failed attempt at our Christmas party during December 2023 due to cyclone Jasper, the team at CUC Cape York has put in extra effort to bring some community cheer, including hosting several student networking events as well as hosting and attending community events in our region. Below is a sample of some of our favourite captures:



Orchid Learn-a-Lot placed second in the scarecrow competition at the Botanic Gardens Open Day.



Fierce competition at our student networking games night!



Adding some style to the Cooktown Careers Expo!



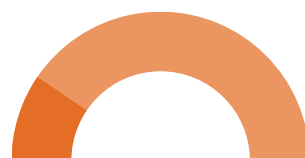
Connecting with all ages, hosting 60's and Better for morning tea.

# SNAPSHOT OF 2024

## 147 STUDENTS



**52%**  
are the first in  
their family  
to study



**19%**  
of students  
identify as  
Indigenous



**35+**  
different  
institutions

**37%**  
study  
full  
time



**63%**  
study  
part  
time

## TOP AREAS OF STUDY

**35%**

Health

**14%**

Education

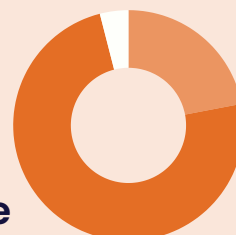
**13%**

Psychology,  
social work &  
Community  
Services

**15+**  
different  
areas of  
study

**4% non-binary**

**74%**  
female



**22%**  
male



**Name**

Hannah Deysel

**Course**

Diploma of Health  
Science - Naturopathy

**Institution**

Endeavour College of  
Natural Medicine



# CELEBRATING OUR STUDENTS

## OUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS



**Simone Riley-Wason**

**Certificate III in Business  
Administration**  
*TAFE Qld*

I studied a Cert III in Business Administration because I wanted to explore a different career path. The biggest challenge was feeling like I was way in over my head, lack of motivation every time I got stuck and had no one to turn to for help, that knew what I needed.

CUC has helped me by having a great space to study in and the relationship I have grown to have with the staff members. They have been great supports, approachable, kind & helpful even if they didn't have an answer; we'd learn something new together.

Having a space to study and further excel your education without the intimidation of having to pay for a study space as well as chosen study area, and moving hours away from family is a great initiative to have in our small community.



**Sarah Jane**

**Certificate III in Early  
Childhood Education and Care**  
*Australian College of Teacher  
Aides and Childcare*

With a background and qualifications in primary education, and most recently experience and a qualification in adult education, I've always valued the role of education and learning both professionally and personally.

Being a "mature-aged" student, while trying to settle into a new community and raising a 6yo has been no easy task. - it's sometimes downright terrifying.

The Country Universities Centre allows me to study in a safe space, with ease, and in an environment that is conducive to my well-being and success. I cannot thank the team enough for the work they do. They've helped me, someone who swore to never study again only one year prior, return to study feeling more empowered and motivated than ever.



# STUDENT STORY

**Jessie  
McIntosh**

**Bachelor of Arts**

**Macquarie  
University**



I'm currently studying Anthropology - I chose this degree mainly because I find humans and the culture that shapes us incredibly fascinating. I later chose to major in Indigenous Australian Studies as I've found it to be one of the most holistic, sustainable as well as oldest cultures in history. I believe we all have a lot to learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practices particularly in the way we interact and connect with country.

There are many challenges in studying remotely including: access to reliable service, regular and long-lasting power and internet outages (Bloomfield), access to facilities and kms travelled in doing so (130km round trip), general higher cost of living, access to basic healthcare etc. creates a more challenging environment for students, across the board rules and protocols within University's that do not consider those students living remotely (e.g. inability to download lectures whilst access to internet is feasible rather having to watch them at specific times which means I am often sleeping in my car (once or twice a week) at the closest township Cooktown in order to complete these tasks).

If there's anyone out there considering study, I would urge you to give it a go! Sometimes the idea of studying or getting degree can be daunting - but instead of looking at the final goal or product aka getting the degree in order to further your career, why don't you just look at it as studying to keep your mind active, learn new and interesting things, more character building than anything! I believe the commercialisation of education has in many ways taken away from the essence of it. We do not need to study only to get a job, we can just study to learn.

The CUC is a great asset to the community because it provides support to those considering and/or participating in study, something that can be considerably daunting at the best of times, remote or not. So, we are very lucky to have a centre like this in Cooktown.





# Bringing degrees closer to regional, rural and remote Australia.

Proudly supported by



**Australian Government**

**Department of Education**