

Life changing course for Koori students

EIGHT students from Wingham, Chatham and Taree High Schools have signed up for a Traineeship in Education Support at North Coast TAFE in a bid to dramatically improve the number of young indigenous students who become teachers and teaching assistants.

The students – four boys and four girls – train as education support officers at TAFE one day a week and do paid work in schools supporting students one day a week.

At the same time, the students will be completing mainstream units for their Year 11 and 12 HSC studies with the hope of going on to university teaching studies.

The innovative program – organised at TAFE, in partnership with State Training Services, the Department of Education and Communities, Newcastle University's Wollotuka Institute and the University of New England (UNE) – is a first for NSW.

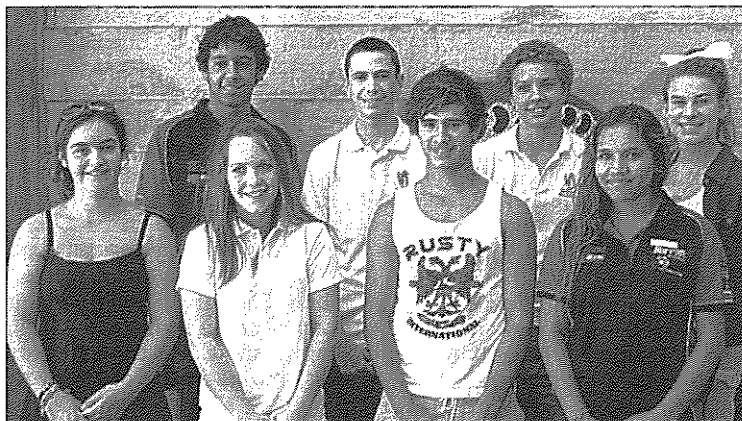
It aims to make the career of teaching more accessible and more achievable for indigenous youth.

TAFE's Aboriginal vocational initiatives consultant, Andrew Saunders, is ecstatic the program has begun after 18 months in the planning:

"Opportunities like this don't just change lives, they change a community," said Andrew, after students and their parents signed up for a Traineeship in Certificate III in Education Support.

"When we have young Aboriginal students going into the schools, helping other young people it gives the Koori students there a sense of connection.

"It's in these formative years when a student is growing up that a sense of connection is most needed.



Teachers in training: (Back) John Cook, Dekota Manton, Jessie Raymond, Paige Conle, (front) Sarah Soars, Sarah Wood, Zac Gibson and Dannielle Ritchie.

"A solid educational background is the platform that most people need to get ahead."

Sixteen-year-old Paige Conley, from Chatham High is one of the students chosen for the program. Paige has always wanted to be a teacher and hooks up with her uncle, Phil Gibney, the deputy principal of St Clare's High School, for regular chats about teaching as a career.

"I did some work experience at Chatham Primary and found it really great," said Paige.

"What I like about teaching is that it is a career that can change people's lives. You see people grow from what they were, to making progress and getting into the best career they can," she said.

After finishing school, Paige would like to study a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor Teaching at UNE. For the next two years she will be doing her traineeship at TAFE every Friday and also spend a day a week at Cundletown Primary School.

At school she will continue her studies in maths, English, Biology

and PDHD as well as representing her school in water polo and hockey.

Seventeen-year-old John Cook, a Taree High student from Old Bar, is also looking forward to the traineeship.

John believes that teaching is a great career that can take you into a variety of jobs.

John is already quite a role model in his community, doing well at school and playing rugby league with the Old Bar Pirates under 18s.

For his placement, John works at Old Bar Primary School, where many of his cousins attend school.

Burrn Aboriginal Community Development co-ordinator, Norma Carney, said an Aboriginal student teacher in training program grew from an idea put forward by the students themselves.

They felt young people really needed a lot more Aboriginal teachers in our education system.