

CODY THRIVES IN SCHOOLTECH

For Cody Graham, a proud Aboriginal man from Palm Island, the opportunity to do high school differently has changed his life.

“**S**choolTech was recommended to me by the Clontarf Foundation which helps young Indigenous men to attend school, finish Year 12 and enter employment. While I was in Year 10, Clontarf recognised that I was struggling to adapt to the traditional school environment, but noticed I achieved in the workplace and with hands-on learning subjects,” Cody said.

SchoolTech is an innovative, award-winning initiative in Cairns between TAFE Queensland and Woree State High School. The program allows students to study for their Queensland Certificate of Education as well as two vocational education and training qualifications while at high school. Through SchoolTech, Cody gets the chance to participate in work and trade opportunities while completing Year 11 and 12.

“This structure definitely suits me better than five days straight in a classroom!”

Cody has completed a **Certificate II in Engineering Pathways (MEM20413)** and is also studying a **Certificate II in Maritime Operations (Coxswain Grade 1 Near Coastal) (MAR20321)**.

“Studying engineering at the TAFE Queensland **Cairns campus** was great. The teachers were good and I got to use excellent equipment. I really enjoyed welding and the chance to make a fire pit. The course gave me the opportunity to try stick, tig and mig welding,” Cody said.

“With the coxswain course, there is so much to learn, it’s more than just driving boats. I undertake maritime training at the **Great Barrier Reef International Marine College** which has a boat simulator, a fire simulator, navigation and radio rooms, a workshop for us to pull outboard motors apart and a pool where we deploy a life raft and do all of our lifesaving activities,” he said.

SchoolTech has partnered with Shoreline to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with the chance to follow in the footsteps of Elders and look after Country. Cody said he has greatly benefitted from the initiative.



Cody Graham, photo courtesy of the Queensland Training Awards

“I have always felt a connection to the sea and the idea of working on a tourist boat really interested me. I get to spend a few days a week working as a trainee on an Experience Co tourism vessel,” Cody said.

“Through my traineeship, I have gained skills in rope splicing, tying ropes, navigation and driving vessels. I am grateful for my traineeship with Experience Co, as I have been given the chance to embrace my culture in the workplace which has helped me gain confidence.

“A typical work day for me starts at the marina at 7am. I fuel up the boats early in the morning and by about 8.30am I welcome the tourists on board. I take care of the ropes before we leave and then I do the lifesaving demonstration.

After that, I am then on deck watch and chat to the tourists about the cultural aspects of the land and sea.

“Once we get to the reef, I usually drive the glass bottom boat and point out the different coral sites, the names of a variety of fish species, as well as how

Green Island was made. At work, my level of maturity has helped me take on a leadership role and I enjoy the opportunity to support younger trainees.”

Cody’s dedication to his studies and traineeship put him in the spotlight.

“I won a regional **Queensland Training Award for School-based Apprentice or Trainee of the Year**. I am so proud of this achievement, as is my family, and I now feel more confident to help younger students who look up to me,” Cody said.

“When I finish Year 12, I plan to continue working with Experience Co. I will also remain in the Shoreline program, meaning I will have support to further my career. My passion is to keep training until I can become a skipper.

“When I finish high school, I would like to become a member of the Junior Shoreline Board and mentor young Indigenous

trainees. I would like the opportunity to give back and visit schools to talk to students about this fantastic pathway.

“Before I started my training, I knew very little about the maritime industry. The training has also improved my general life skills and my attitude towards school and work.

“I am always telling others of the great opportunity I have been given through SchoolTech. I’m influencing younger cousins and younger Aboriginal kids to come to TAFE. Others can see that I thrive at what I do and that I put all my effort into studying and getting my trade certificates so that my future is positive. Finding my passion and talent has changed my life and made me a more positive person,” he said. 🌀