

Senator Michaelia Cash:

Hi, I'm Senator Michaelia Cash, Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. Welcome to National Skills Week 2020, and to this year's podcast series, Journeys to Success brought to you by SkillsOne. In this podcast series, you'll hear from a number of VET Alumni and Australian Training award winners. They will share with you interesting and varied journeys they've taken due to their Vocational Education and Training. Our VET Alumni and Australian Training award winners come from all walks of life. They have inspirational stories to share about what prompted their learning decisions, their influences, their training, and work journey, and why Vocational Education and Training was the right choice for them. This podcast is a great way to learn about the success people have had in their careers and life. There is so much diversity and opportunity that a VET pathway can offer. So enjoy the podcast, be inspired, and the best of luck to those who are starting on their VET journey. And if you want more information on where a Vocational Educational and Training pathway can take you, visit the National Careers Institute website at nci.dese.gov.au.

Rachael:

Hello and welcome. My name is Rachael Beck and I'm really happy to be hosting this podcast. This episode explores the experience of three Vocational Education and Training Alumni who have all had very different experiences and journeys with Vocational Education and Training pathways or VET, as we like to call it. One thing in common is that they are all passionate about providing guidance and information to young people and their influences on the opportunities and diversity in VET.

Rachael:

Let me introduce our panel of Alumni. So, firstly, we have Cassandra Brown. She's trained in a number of careers during her life and is currently employed in the accounting sector. Cass is the 2018 Tasmanian Training Awards Vocational Student of the Year and a finalist in the 2018 Australian Training Awards. Lewis Brown works in the community sector and is the Victoria 2018 Koorie Student of the Year and a finalist in the 2018 Australian Training Awards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year. Chloe Baigent is currently working in the youth work. She is the Western Australian Vocational Student of the Year, 2019, and a finalist in the 2019 Australian Training Awards for Vocational Student of the Year.

Rachael:

Today, we have asked them to join us to discuss their decisions, insights, and experiences in training and work and the impact a vocational training has had on them. We will also be discussing the advice they received throughout their journey and what advice they would like to see provided to school students, and also to their parents and career advisors. So, welcome, Cass, Chloe, and Lewis. Reports are that 47% of young people face strong pressure from their school to enter university. Four in five parents, or 79%, would prefer their children go to university after leaving school rather than undertake a VET pathway. So, here we are, you guys. Each of you, can you talk me through your initial journey out of school and how the decision to undertake a VET pathway was made? Was there pressure to go to uni for you guys? How about, Chloe, you first?

Chloe:

Yeah, I think there was. My mother was university educated and it was something that I just thought was the better pathway because that's the way that the school sort of pushed it. But, unfortunately, I didn't even end up completing my TE at the time and I went straight into the workforce, and it wasn't

until a couple of years later that I discovered that VET when I actually studied horticulture back then, which ended up being a really great experience for me and actually got me 10 years in that industry in a variety of jobs. Yeah.

Rachael:

Fantastic. How about you, Lewis?

Lewis:

For me, the university agenda was definitely pushed in high school. I can definitely vouch for that. I felt that vocational education wasn't much of an option and I feel somewhat disappointed reflecting on it now, but I'm very proud of where I am now. But my initial journey out of school, I left school with not a whole lot of ambition. And I feel like that was half a product of not being advised of what kind of amazing opportunities there are in vocational education. I felt like there was a definite negative stigma behind it.

Rachael:

So what did you end up studying?

Lewis:

I didn't. I worked in the gambling industry and it wasn't until way down the track that I entered the workforce in the Community Services Organization and they supported me through my study. And I really felt that I wasn't capable of doing university so there wasn't much option for me after leaving school.

Rachael:

Right. Okay. How about you, Cassandra?

Cassandra:

Similar with Lewis. I didn't know what I was going to do. In college, I dropped out. There was definitely the pressure of choosing those subjects that would lead you to university. So, I had a plethora of a wide variety of different subjects that I was undertaking, but I wasn't really... That was a way to keep my options open. So, I ended up dropping out and not following through with anything at first until I was about 19 and I scored an apprenticeship and that's how I entered the VET pathway. But there was definitely pressure at the colleges to go down the university pathway. And I just think there's not enough emphasis on just letting the student choose where they want to go and what they want out of their life and what they want right then and there, rather than what's going to ...

Rachael:

Yeah, rather in 30 years.

Cassandra:

Yeah, because that's going to change, you know?

Rachael:

Exactly. And how great a influence were teachers, or career advisors, parents in that space when you were just going, "What am I going to do?"

Cassandra:

My parents, of course, they want the best for me, but they also... I don't know that they really were directing me anywhere in particular, but definitely, the schools were prompting towards the university. And yeah, I just pretty much just... I had the option to do whatever I wanted, but I didn't know what that was. So, yeah. There's just too many options.

Rachael:

Yeah, I understand. Lewis, you had something to say?

Lewis:

I always have something to say. In my experience, my parents wanted the best for me, and what was communicated to my parents was that university is the best option for me, and that's coming from... That could be coming from the school itself. And I felt like if I was aware and if my parents were aware about what kind of pathways existed, I feel like that we could have sat down and had a really deep conversation just about where I wanted to go, and where I wanted to be, and how to get there. And I really felt like we could have had that conversation if vocational education was on the table a lot more at the time. But, another thing I wanted to add was that it feels like a long time ago now, but from my memory of Year 12, I only remember being taken out to different universities to have a look around and exploring different bachelors and honors and all that. I didn't feel like that there was much of a... They didn't take us out to a vocational education institute, which I felt like I would have benefited a lot from.

Rachael:

Yeah. Yeah. I totally agree. And so back to you, Chloe. Can you tell me about your vocational education experiences? Was it a good experience? What were some of the highlights, the best parts of your training? How's it helped you in your career?

Chloe:

I've actually studied three different vocational pathways so I started off with horticulture quite young, ended up working at the Perth Zoo from that, and got straight into government, and that was great opportunities. And then whilst I was in that job, I decided to study a management course, a certificate, and that was fantastic. That was actually through a private RTO. That then made me sort of be able to step up within that industry so although it was completely different to horticulture because I was studying business, it actually really fit in well with where I wanted to go.

Chloe:

But then after, I had sort of had enough of that industry altogether and felt like there wasn't going to be much opportunity in my local regional area, I ended up, yeah, going back to TAFE and studying youth work. And it was a completely different pathway and, yeah, lots of people sort of discouraged me from that because I was starting again. But I already had all those other skills that I could use within youth work, and it's actually ended up being a huge benefit. I now have career flexibility as well. So, knowing that I've got three different complete networks, if I wanted to change jobs tomorrow, I could have a really good chance at doing that. COVID is a huge example of how that can be a huge advantage, just being able to have flexibility because you've actually studied in quite a few different areas.

Chloe:

And, of course, during VET, it doesn't take that long to get through a course. You can get it done quite quickly if you commit yourself well. So, if I had've gone to university, which I was thinking about, I would still be studying now. So yeah.

Rachael:

That's right, with a huge debt. And, also, you said there was cross-pollination. It didn't matter if you'd done totally different areas of study, there was always going to be skills from one study avenue that were going to cross into the other. No matter what you studied on it, you're going to have skills that you can take throughout your life.

Chloe:

Definitely. Yeah. It was something that I didn't even realize, I think, when I started.

Rachael:

Just talking about your vocational education experiences, was it a good experience? What was some of the highlights, and the best parts of your training, and how's it helped you in the career that you are in now?

Lewis:

So for me, I've been lucky enough to be in two different vocational education programs. I started off in the Certificate IV in Community Services, and I've also done the Diploma of Leadership and Management, and working in an Aboriginal organization at the time, I've really felt like the skills that I was learning every week from the community services certificate, I can bring that back to my role and support families. And I feel like I can say that, but I feel like I can't add a lot of weight to what that actually means to make a big impact on somebody's life. I was well-equipped with the relevant skills to bring to that role and just know what to do in certain situations of a family crisis. And, as a result of that, I've seen a lot of good outcomes from applying those skills in my workplace.

Lewis:

And that could be ranging from supporting families in obtaining work, supporting families in getting on top of their mental health. I feel forever grateful to my peers in the course, as well as my trainer, to be able to apply that to my work and support those families. I studied in an Aboriginal-specific RTO for the Certificate IV and I went to a mainstream organization institute for the diploma. And, although there's a big difference in that I was being able to study alongside my people, I found the similarities in the peer support, it was very similar in that we were supporting each other in helping each other to succeed. And I quickly realized that's just vocational education for you.

Rachael:

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. How about you, Cassandra?

Cassandra:

Well, I've used Vocational Education and Training for a wide variety of industries. I started in automotive. I've used it in mining, hospitality, and now accounting. I've studied in class and online, and I just think that every single aspect of these experiences has helped me in more ways than just in a

vocational sense. I think you gain life skills, and just the skills that I got out of the vocational education courses that I've undertaken and successfully completed, that they give me an advantage going into the workforce because, for example, using accounting software in a Certificate IV at university, my colleague hadn't done that until he'd got to his fourth year or third year. So I just think that it just gave me an advantage of being work-ready.

Rachael:

So guys, talk to me about the idea of earning and learning in the same industry.

Chloe:

Yeah. I can touch on that. So yeah, whilst I did my last course in youth works, so Certificate IV, it was at my local campus. I've got a mortgage. I'm 30. I definitely had to think about how I was going to be able to still pay that, but yet study full time. So, I was lucky enough that I could stay in my old industry and work in a casual capacity to make that happen. And knowing that I did that really successfully then, I've now actually working two part-time jobs, which gives me huge amount of flexibility to drop one of them and take on study again, which I plan to do in a couple of years.

Chloe:

I would like to get some more training behind me and maybe so I can add to my skills within youth work and actually train some young people so possibly doing my training in assessment, and the way that that's delivered in my local area is really flexible. They sort of give you an opportunity to do it within a few [inaudible 00:17:06] which is going to fit in really well with my job because I can shuffle some things around and yeah, do that [crosstalk 00:17:11].

Rachael:

Excellent. Lewis, COVID, we're all talking about it. How has it impacted your work and how do you think the vocational study pathways have helped you secure a job that is safe in COVID times?

Lewis:

COVID has definitely impacted my role in that I can't go into the workplace and I have been working from home for about five to six months now. But, thinking back to my Diploma of Leadership and Management, the skill that I grabbed from there that I can think of when applying to my current role now is definitely the communication skills. A big part of the diploma was that there are great ways that I can network. There are great ways that I can communicate to an audience and figure out what kind of messaging I'm trying to deliver. And in my current role where I speak to community about education options at my educational institution, I definitely apply the skills that I grabbed from the diploma and use them in a remote setting now.

Rachael:

Yeah. Excellent. How about you, Cassandra?

Cassandra:

Definitely similar to Lewis, as he said about the communication. That's definitely been very important because I too have been working from home since COVID started. The benefit of my job is that it can be done remotely. So it's all via computers and online. So all of those skills have just continued to support

me. I do feel a little bit isolated, so I've actually... To get my social interaction, I've actually just jumped online in the last couple of weeks into another registered training organization and got a Responsible Service of Alcohol so I can go down to my local pub and get my social interaction there. So, I'm doing that a couple of nights a week. You can chop and change so easily with vocational education. I just think that the options are endless.

Rachael:

And I suppose once you get into it and you do a couple of courses, as you all have done, your confidence is boosted as well. You think, "I can do this. I can change. I can." So this leads into my next question. What insight or advice do you wish you were given when you were at school? What advice would you give to parents and career advisors as influences, Chloe?

Chloe:

For the young people, there are so many options out there and there's actually some really good websites out there these days that you can jump onto, like the joboutlook.gov.au website. So it's a government website and it's got a great skills match and career quiz on there, and that just really opens up to see all the industries and you can go deeper into that and then it'll show you what courses can get you into those jobs.

Chloe:

So that's a good one to just do all the time, whenever you're feeling lost because it sort of broadens your horizons to what's out there. But I think, for parents, it's really important to get all your friends around and maybe get them talking to your kids about how they got where they are because we've all got different jobs, and I think telling stories is a really strong part of this. A lot of those people may work with people that are VET qualified in the same jobs.

Chloe:

Yeah, definitely asking about VET pathways at school so if you're not being told about it, just ask your career advisor, "Okay, well, I'm not really feel comfortable doing ATAR," which I know a lot of people that I work with are struggling with at the moment. But maybe asking about what VET pathway can they do to still get to that main goal because all the pathways through VET, they can get you into university if you're set on that or they can get you straight into a job that in five years time you might be able to qualify for the same role that somebody that has gone to university. So, yeah, definitely explore that VET pathway.

Rachael:

Excellent. Lewis, what would you say?

Lewis:

What I would like to see happen more, going off my own experience in high school 10 years ago, is the Australian VET Alumni having more of a presence in high school and us Alumni given that opportunity to speak to these young people, as well as that what I would like to see happen is that career advisors are well equipped to pass on that information. Different resources are available. Students know to visit the My Skills website when it comes to learning about what kind of pathways exist and universities doing a better job in pushing those pathways. So I know in my institution we have a website dedicated to pathway options, but I know other universities can do a better job in that they can talk about what kind

of vocational education can be credited towards a higher education course or you could see this kind of work at the end of the vocational education journey.

Rachael:

Great. Okay. Cassandra?

Cassandra:

I think the young people should go with their gut instinct, and whatever you choose today may not be what you want in the future. Life changes. Careers change, and that's not the end of the world. I've changed careers so many times and I don't regret any of it. And the other thing is that a lot of the career advisors and influencers at school are actually university educated and they probably haven't really got much of a big overview of the VET. So I think we should probably educate them on what is available because they just push... A lot of them quit university. But, yeah, I'd say to my younger self or to young people today that go with your gut instinct. Listen to yourself because at the end of the day, you've only got to live with yourself, and changing your career is no big deal. If you change in a few years, that's not the end of the world. And, as Chloe mentioned before and I think Lewis did too, the My Skills website, also the National Careers Institute website is great for information on where you want to go.

Rachael:

I'd like to thank you guys. Thank you for your words of wisdom, and to the audience and guests, watch out for the next episode in the podcast series. See you later.

Rachael:

The reality of the future as afforded in a recent media series is that you will need to be working and earning at the same time, preferably in your chosen career area. Employers need graduates who have well-rounded skills and they need to be work-ready. This is achievable through Vocational Education and Training qualifications.

Host of series:

Thank you very much for joining us for this podcast. We hope that you enjoyed listening. If you want more information on Vocational Education and Training career pathways and your own way to succeed, check out the National Careers Institute website. You can find them at nci.dese.gov.au. This podcast was an initiative of the Australian government. We look forward to you joining us for another episode in this podcast series, but in the meantime, please stay safe and take care.