

Koori health practitioner says she has a lot to give

JENNY DENTON

“I’M a person who feels like I’ve got a lot to give and a lot to do,” says Melanie Lane, the Kerang co-ordinator of Mallee District Aboriginal Services, explaining how she came to be back at work just seven months after being diagnosed with lung cancer.

Her journey with the disease - which she contracted despite having never been a smoker - was “very up and down”, but seven years later Mrs Lane is clear of cancer and conquering new challenges.

On Tuesday the Yorta Yorta woman graduated from a two-year course to qualify as an Aboriginal health practitioner – one of only 40 around Victoria - and gave a speech at the Melbourne Town Hall on behalf of all 62 students who had completed courses through the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.

Also on stage at the ceremony, which was broadcast live on Melbourne radio station 3KND - Kool ‘N’ Deadly - was official guest speaker, Senator Pat Dodson.

Despite being scared of speaking in front of such a big crowd, Mrs Lane “got up there and just talked.” Later, when she listened to the video of the speech her husband recorded, she came to the conclusion that “It wasn’t too bad!”

Completing the course - a Certificate IV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practice - was a big achievement for the mother of four, particularly because it required her to spend one week every month in Melbourne.

“I’m originally from Melbourne and I hate it. I moved here over 19 years ago and never looked back,” she says.

“But I thought, ‘No, I can do this. Just for two years’. But it was hard leaving the kids.”

“Every month, that week would come around and they would be like, ‘No, not again!’ My daughter Chardae, who’s ten, would be nearly dragging me back into the house but I’d say, ‘It’ll be worth it in the end.’”

“When I was down there for that week, if there was work I could just take back to my room and do while I was there, I did it. There were a lot of workplace projects to do too, because you had to work with clients, so I had to find time in the workplace to do that. But I got through.”

As a health worker at MDAS for

eight years, Mrs Lane has a lot of experience performing health checks and providing care, including for patients with chronic diseases such as cancer.

The new qualification will also enable her to take blood samples, and if VACCHO is successful in advocating for a change to Victorian laws, to do immunisations.

“I never thought I’d be a person to take people’s bloods,” she says.

“But I love it! I did my clinical placement at Clinical Labs up at the hospital. At first I was so nervous I didn’t want to hurt anybody, but I haven’t hurt anyone yet. So that’s given me more confidence. It’s just changed the way I think about things, because I never ever thought I’d be doing anything like that.”

The training has increased her confidence generally, Mrs Lane says - in the potential of her organisation and its programs, as well as her own abilities.

“I’m also on the board for MDAS, and because we’ve got different sites at Mildura, Robinvale and Swan Hill, I feel like I need to be a voice for the Kerang community because we’re smaller and I think we need to be heard. I have lots of dreams for this place,” she says.

She also points out that the organisation services the non-Indigenous community.

“There are some specific funded programs. But to come and see our GP or nurse or myself you don’t have to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. We will look after anybody.”

A big focus for MDAS at the moment is the health promotion initiative Deadly Choices, which is “trying to change people’s mindsets and encourage them to have healthier lifestyles and be more active.”

The program, which was established by the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) in Queensland, has had significant success in closing the health and life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, the institute says, and has been adopted by more than 35 Aboriginal health organisations around the country.

“When a person comes in and gets their health check done, we give them a Deadly Choices shirt,” Mrs Lane says.

“You see more and more people around the community wearing one. It’s been great. We’ve had people come in for health checks that have not come in before, ever.”

“Up at the high school we’re



Aboriginal health practitioner, Melanie Lane is also Kerang co-ordinator for Mallee District Aboriginal Services.

doing an eight-week education program for all the Koori kids, who have been amazing. We get them to set a goal, so each week they go home with a goal and they let us know, the week after, if they’ve achieved it. Last week was nutrition. Their goal was to cut back on energy drinks, and one kid who really drank a lot of energy drinks came back and said he had only had two for the whole week.”

“Deadly Choices is amazing. You have to purchase a licence for it from IUIH, who are actually proving that they’re closing the gap. MDAS bought the licence for it last year. So hopefully with that program, we can start closing the gap too.”

Doing the course has given her the confidence to “actually go out and do these programs now,” Mrs Lane says, as well as increased her skills and knowledge with health promotion and management.

Northern District Community Health chief executive officer,

Mandy Hutchinson, said that Mrs Lane’s achievement was “a mammoth effort” which was positive for the whole community.

“Having an Aboriginal health practitioner with these qualifications and skills means that our local people will have much better access to health services in their own community. It will also take some pressure off other health services in Kerang, as Mel will have the capacity to support her clients even more than before,” Ms Hutchinson said.

“I am so very proud of this amazing Yorta Yorta woman, a wonderful role model for the next generation of women in our community and a cherished colleague.”

“I just wanted to prove to myself and my kids that it doesn’t matter what happens in life, if you put your mind to it, you can achieve anything,” Mrs Lane says. “So I feel like I achieved what I set out to achieve.”

“It was so worth it.”

Car gone after a .101 BAC

A MOTORIST’S vehicle has been impounded at Kerang after the driver allegedly failed a breath analysis test.

Police intercepted a vehicle in Boundary Street at about 3.30pm last Friday.

The 43 year old male driver underwent a preliminary breath test and a subsequent evidentiary breath test which indicated a reading of 0.101.

His vehicle was impounded and he will be summonsed to appear in court at a later date.

LAMMING AND CALVING REQUIREMENTS

- ✓ Calf Muesli or Pellets
- ✓ Milk Replacers
- ✓ Vaccines & Drenches
- ✓ Pine Shavings
- ✓ Scour Treatments
- ✓ Ear Tags & Marking Supplies

P: 5457 2235
M: 0437 924 012

Providing a local option for cremation

Talk to your family funeral director today about this local option

Golden Rivers Crematorium

Philip and Karen Davey
57 Parkman Avenue,
BARHAM 2732
info@grcrematorium.com.au

A locally owned and operated family business, bringing a caring and compassionate service to our community, with over 30 years' experience in the funeral industry

EVERYONE MATTERS

Keep banking local at Australia Post.

Over 3,500 Post Offices in communities all across Australia now offer agency banking services.

Deposit and withdraw at your local Post Office.

Bank@Post is an agency service provided by Australia Post on behalf of over 60 financial institutions. Bank@Post is available at participating Post Offices. Services available are cash withdrawals, deposits and balance enquiries. Consult your financial institution for terms and conditions of the Bank@Post service.