



Student Spotlight: Shona O'Brien

We chat to Shona O'Brien who generously shares her experiences within the education system, overcoming anxiety and navigating internships and professional environments on her journey to become a lawyer.

Shona is a proud Torres Strait Islander woman who was proudly raised on Wurundjeri Country. She is studying a Bachelor of Laws at RMIT University and plans to graduate at the end of 2023.

Shona has demonstrated a deep passion and determination to become a lawyer, "My family has a broad relationship with the law from having Chief Magistrates in my family to having members incarcerated, I always hoped that I would be on the right side of the law. I started my Bachelor of Laws when I was in year 12 by completing an accelerate program at Deakin university, which acted as the catalyst which inspired me to continue my journey to become a lawyer.

Unfortunately, I did not get the ATAR required to get back into law school when I completed year 12, but nonetheless I was determined to succeed. I started the Bachelor of Legal Dispute Studies in 2020 at RMIT and implemented a 10 year plan to complete this 3 year degree, then complete the post-grad Doctor Juris at RMIT then complete a year of Practical Legal Training at the College of Law in Melbourne. However, RMIT introduced a Bachelor of Laws when I was in my second semester of the Bachelor of Legal Dispute Studies.

I Completed Semester 2 in 2020 with a 3.9 GPA, almost perfect, and transferred into the Bachelor of Laws."

Shona learned about Career Trackers, which aims to help Indigenous students to complete university and to prepare Indigenous students for the workforce by providing them to internship opportunities, through an email from Ngarara Willim Centre. Limited in internship opportunities due to the pandemic, Shona completed internships with the Department of Education and Training.

"So, how did my time at DET relate to my law degree? Well, it didn't but it taught me what to look for in a good team environment and taught me a new way of problem solving which is not taught at university. This internship also gave me more confidence about going into a fulltime job once I finish my degree, but I was still not entirely satisfied with the experiences in my internship." Shona also added that **"without Nagara Willim and Career Trackers, I would still be a ball of crippling Anxiety."**

Through Career Trackers, Shona was able to have frank and honest conversations about her desire for law and corporate experience, which prompted a switch in Advisors over to Will.

“Will fought for me to get corporate experience which led to me obtaining an internship at Pitcher Partners. Pitcher Partners in a national accounting firm but their professional services extend beyond accounting. I interviewed for a position within the consulting team which was a fun experience...It was not what I was expecting but I learnt that their hiring methodology is based off the idea that everything they do in consulting you can learn, but you must be able to work in team environments and be able to get along with your work team.”

“Whilst working on a broad range of projects is fun because I get to refine my critical thinking skills, **my favourite part of my internship at Pitcher is the free coffee at their internal café and the informal coffee catchups with partners and my colleagues. This made the environment I was in much more comfortable and made asking for help a lot easier.** What I notice at Pitchers, is upper management like managers and Partners will invest as much time into you as you are willing to invest in the work you’re doing.”

Following her internship with Pitcher Partners Shona was offered a part-time role as a Supporting Analyst, which she happily accepted.

Reflecting on the impact Ngarara Willim has had so far, Shona explained “Growing up a pale Indigenous person was confronting because my Aboriginality is always questioned, until I pull out photos of my black Dad and Aunties. **The Ngarara Willim orientation day I went to when I started university in 2020 was the first time I saw Indigenous people that looked like me and my brothers.** Ngarara Willim is more than just an Indigenous centre that fills RMIT’s Reconciliation obligations; it is a place of belonging and support.”

“Without Ngarara Willim I would not be where I am now. Ngarara have supported my studies by providing me with a tutor who has academically boosted my confidence and is a daily reminder of my growth. I was displaced from home when I was 16 and have put myself through school ever since. However, the scholarship Ngarara Willim supply meant I can focus on my studies and not have to stress so much about my financial circumstances which has directly reduced my anxiety levels.”

“Ngarara Willim is in my corner when I have a bad day at uni, and provide a safe culturally appropriate space for Indigenous students like myself and hundreds of other students and lives up to its English translation of ‘gathering home’. Culture is incredibly important to me because there was a long time where, **I was scared to be who I am but the Advisors and friends I have made from being a student at Ngarara Willim has increased my confidence and given me a sense of belonging within mob.**”

