

DEVELOPMENT STUDIES GRADUATE

JESSICA RICHARDSON



CURRENT ROLE: EQUITY AND INCLUSION OFFICER, VANUATU ASSOCIATION OF SPORTS AND NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE (VASANOC) VANUATU

DEGREE: BACHELOR OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

FUTURE PLANS: SPORT DEVELOPMENT WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN AUSTRALIA

Jessica has been living in Vanuatu for the last three years, volunteering with people with disability in sport. Speaking with Jessica, it was obvious that she is incredibly enthusiastic about her role, and she cares deeply about the people she works with.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO SINCE WE LAST SPOKE?

At the end of her first year in Vanuatu, Jessica attended the 2018 Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast with their team of Para-athletes. This event marked an incredible moment as Para-athlete Friana Kwevira took home Vanuatu's first ever Commonwealth medal, a bronze medal in the Women's F46 Javelin. Having grown up watching the Commonwealth Games, admiring the athletes, Jessica was honoured to be able to attend the Games and walk out with the Team Vanuatu in the opening ceremony. It was an incredible and surreal experience for Jessica. Following this, Jessica was clearly not finished with her work in Vanuatu as she applied for a second Australian Volunteers Assignment as an Equity and Inclusion Officer. Building on her previous work, this position expanded to work with people with disability and women aiming to increase their participation in all levels and roles in sport in Vanuatu.

Image: Jessica Richardson (left) and Friana Kwevira (right) at



the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

Since beginning her work, Jessica has noticed key changes when it comes to disability inclusion in Vanuatu. When Jessica first began, her team would contact the media asking them to run their stories in the newspaper. However, as their work gained momentum, the media started taking interest and were

going to them for stories. Another positive change has been an increase in paid employment for athletes. Being able to support themselves is incredibly important for the continuation of the community development work that Jessica and her team do. Finally, Jessica noted that Vanuatu is incredibly proud of their para-athletes. This was highlighted when one of their athletes was selected as the flag bearer during the 2019 Pacific Games, a first for the Pacific.

Image: Team Vanuatu at the 2019 Pacific Games.



Every day is different and challenging, which Jessica loves. Some days will be catching up on administrative work, other days involve facilitating training sessions to support coaches with athlete's development, whilst others may involve applying for visas for their athletes or updating social media platforms. Jessica loves that her work environment encompasses her passion for community development with health and sport.

Jessica's experience in Vanuatu has been incredibly diverse and challenging, however she knows that she has grown and developed personally and professionally as a result.

HOW RELEVANT HAS YOUR DEGREE BEEN SINCE YOU GRADUATED?

Jessica reflected that her Development Studies degree changed her mindset and perspective, and this is relevant every day in her working life. This allows Jessica to value the input of all community members, approach tasks with a bottom-up approach and challenge the social norms. Jessica always has

community development implemented in the work she carries out. Whether it is there in a small way, or underlining an entire workshop, keeping this focus ensures projects are sustainable and can be implemented successfully.

“It doesn’t matter what I’m doing, I always try to make sure I’m thinking about it being people centred.”

Reflecting back, Jessica found the freedom within the Development Studies degree challenging. However, because the degree was so broad, Jessica was able to decide what direction she would take. The degree set her up with a broad base of understanding around community and project management.

Finishing her degree, Jessica knew she wanted to work in community development overseas. After receiving advice at an alumni event, Jessica completed a Masters in International Public Health. This allowed Jessica to focus her studies, and expand her skills to enable her to begin her career in an area she was really interested in.

ADVICE: WORK PLACEMENT, NETWORKING AND ABORIGINAL STUDIES

Completing a work placement allows you to gain experience, as well as expand your network. Jessica completed her placement with an Indigenous community development organisation in Kununurra, Western Australia. Jessica was involved with a program aimed at working with parents to help keep their kids engaged with school. For Jessica this confirmed that she was on the right track. It may seem intimidating having to seek out your own placement however, this is what you have to do when you leave university and you are applying for jobs. Plus, because you are in charge of your placement, you have the opportunity to go somewhere that really interests you.

Networking can be another daunting aspect for some students. Although you will need to put yourself out there and make introductions, Jessica wanted to remind you that you already have a huge and growing network. At the moment your network is your fellow students, professors, tutors and the colleagues you meet through volunteering and work placements.

“If you value the human connections you make through your work, then your network will grow organically.”

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

For the last three years, Jessica has been able to combine her passion for sports with community development. Although she loves her role in Vanuatu, it is a volunteer position and she knew it was not a “forever job”.

Last year Jessica was invited to attend a workshop at the [Women’s Sports Leadership Academy](#). The workshop involved a lot of self-reflection, digging deeper and dreaming bigger. During this workshop, Jessica visualised what direction she wanted her career to go in the future. The accumulation of Jessica’s experiences has given her a clear idea of what she wants to accomplish in the future. Knowing what she has been able to achieve overseas, Jessica wants to bring her experiences back to Australia and continue building her skills and giving back to the community. Ideally this would involve

community development through sport in Indigenous communities in Australia. Jessica recommends doing this visualisation activity yourself.



Image: Attendees of the three-day Women’s Sports Leadership Workshop for upcoming female leaders in sport in Vanuatu.

Jessica’s passion for Aboriginal community development arose whilst completing a few courses run by [The Wollotuka Institute](#) during her degree. This is an area that Jessica feels passionate about, and once again would love to combine it with her passion for sport, particularly rowing.



Image: Jessica is the Director of Rowing at the Vanuatu Rowing Association.

Jessica is always mindful that she is fulfilling a community development role, with a focus on long term changes. The way that she carries out her role ensures that these changes will continue to take place after she leaves.

For more information about the [Bachelor of Development Studies](#) you can contact:

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