

JOLEEN REACHES FOR THE UN

Joleen Ryan entered the cut and thrust world of politics and social policy early in her life. She was just 20 when in 2001 she was invited to be the youth voice on the Victorian Indigenous Violence Task Force. She experienced politicking at a grass roots level and saw what was possible if people in power are committed to change. It was a good beginning for a woman who would like to one day work for the United Nations in Geneva, developing policies at an international level.



But for now, Joleen is focused on the final year of her Bachelor of Social Work at Deakin University in her hometown of Geelong. To support her in her studies, Joleen has been awarded a 2008 Good Shepherd Indigenous Reconciliation Scholarship.

The university degree builds on her work with the Wathaurong community in Geelong and her years with the MacKillop Family Services as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer.

"Working with MacKillop has been invaluable to my course work. And the course has really expanded my understanding of the many issues I worked on as an Aboriginal liaison officer, particularly getting kids linked into the community," Joleen said.

Joleen's more immediate career goals are focused on the areas of education and health, two issues of concern within the Aboriginal community and in mainstream Australia.

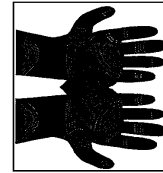
"I really want to finish my degree because I know it's the best way of getting into social policy and making a difference to some of the really big challenges facing our community," she said. "We have to find ways to improve the retention rate of Aboriginal kids at high school, so that more and more kids will have their VCE and do tertiary studies if they want to."



"More importantly I would like to see more Aboriginal kids set themselves goals, no matter how big or small that goal is. There are lots of opportunities available and I would like Aboriginal kids to see how far they can go with the goals they set themselves, and then try to go a little further. If you believe, you can achieve!"

Joleen has set a few major goals for herself including further study down the track in the area of law or education. In 10 years she would like to be working at the UN.

"I have worked on a lot of grass roots programs and committees and I know that the desire and push for change has to come from the community, but it has to be supported from the top," she said.



It's only a few weeks until the end of the financial year. If you have any spare cash and you are interested in making a tax-deductible donation, consider putting it towards the Indigenous scholarship program.

You can make a donation to:

*The Mary MacKillop Foundation
PO Box 1508*

North Sydney 2059

Or online at:

www.mackillopfoundation.org.au

