Eva Lawler:

Former student Darwin Community College (DCC), Darwin Institute of Technology (DIT), Northern Territory University (NTU) and Charles Darwin University(CDU)

01 Eva Lawler on: Cyclone Tracy and going to school in Darwin in the 1970s

I started my high schooling after Cyclone Tracy so between finishing year 7 and starting year 8 – in those days year 8 was high school – we had Cyclone Tracy, and my family and I were evacuated for about 3 months and then returned. At that stage there was only Darwin High School so all the secondary students in Darwin attended Darwin High School. Then in 1980 - I graduated in 1979 - I went to Darwin Community College.

So in those days Darwin was a very different place. The population after Cyclone Tracy dropped dramatically, obviously, and most people, most families, were living in quite makeshift accommodation. My family was living in a place that had been repaired, that had been blown away with Cyclone Tracy, and I had five brothers and sisters.

02 Eva Lawler on: Darwin Community College in the 1980s

So in 1980 Darwin Community College was, in hindsight, quite a funny little place really, or a big place. It was in Catterson Street in Winnellie. It was an industrial shed that they had converted into an educational institution.

And so it had walls that went three-quarters of the way up so if you were in a lecture you could hear the people next door. If you went to talk to your lecturer you knew it wasn’t a private conversation because there was no ceiling on the rooms so the noise would float through. And everybody smoked in those days. That’s one of my vibrant memories about lecturers who had pipes and people who smoked. There was always this sort of haze in the building as you walked in from people smoking. But there were no outdoor areas, not like now where there’s beautiful outdoor spaces at this CDU campus. You were either in the carpark or you were inside.

The library was at the centre of the building. And then the classrooms were around the sides I guess. At the time it was an amazing place for us all to go. You had a close relationship with the lecturers because there were so few of you really. You’d go round to the lecturers’ places for BBQs and drinks and things like that and still had very much the university life where the big issues were debated and you had an opinion about everything.
In our first year of uni, 1980, was when Lindy Chamberlain’s baby was taken by a dingo, and I vividly remember being university students debating that. One of the major issues around that time was mining of uranium at Jabiru – something that happened in the late 70s early 80s. And there were plenty of discussions around whether we should be mining uranium. The university days I think were the same as they are elsewhere – the politics of the time were strongly discussed.

**03  Eva Lawler on: the focus on mature age students**

As a 17 or 18 year old, I would have been in the minority – most of the other students were mature age students. So in 1980 it probably started with about 30 of us doing our diploma of teaching – and probably about 5 of us were straight out of highschool. The rest were mature age and I think that was a wonderful thing. I learnt lots and I made lifelong friends with some of those people. I think that’s been one of the positive things around Darwin Community College, Charles Darwin University, or whatever the name of the institution – it has provided those opportunities for people to go back as mature age students. That is something that the university has been done very very well over the years.

**04  Eva Lawler on: the importance for Territorians to be able to study and stay in the NT**

I also was a Territorian and I loved the Territory and it has continued to this day. I didn’t have any real interest in going elsewhere so Darwin Community College was a wonderful opportunity to do teacher training and to have a career in the Territory.

To have home grown people is I think such an asset to the Territory – they are committed to the Territory, they are the people that will stay, they have a strong understanding of what the Territory is about. I think as a Territorian we want young university graduates to stay in the Territory. Those people, whether they are teachers or lawyers and now doctors, to me they are people who understand the Territory so to have home grown people is such an asset to the Territory. They are committed to the Territory, they are the people that will stay, they have a strong understanding of what the Territory is about.

**05  Eva Lawler on: being proud of her NT education**

I think that has been such a positive thing for me to be able to be in the Territory.

I’m forever grateful for that opportunity to study in the Northern Territory. I’ve always been very proud to tell people that I’ve done all my study at the university.