

Overcoming barriers and supporting others: the success of Trudy Kalotiti

Vanuatu

SHARE

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As a child, Trudy Joel Kalotiti would weave with her mother. They would sell their handicraft to visitors from cruise ships that passed by her island of Aneityum (also known as Mystery Island) in Vanuatu. In 2015, Ms Kalotiti returned to her village on Aneityum island as a handicraft trainer with the Australian Government-funded Vanuatu Skills Partnership.

Ms Kalotiti finished formal schooling at the end of primary school but continued to hone her handicraft skills, including basket and mat weaving. After marriage and a move to the main island of Efate, she branched out to make contemporary handicraft like bracelets and necklaces. The variety of products she developed prompted interest from friends and small businesses who were drawn to her distinctive pieces of wearable art.

As interest grew, Ms Kalotiti completed training offered by the Vanuatu Skills Partnership.



Trudy Joel Kalotiti during the Pacific Women Vanuatu Country Reflection Workshop in November 2018. Photo credit: Pacific Women Support Unit. The project (formerly known as the Vanuatu Skills for Economic Growth Program and prior as the Vanuatu Technical and Vocational Education and Training Sector Strengthening Program) works with key productive sector departments to identify priority economic growth opportunities that can be maximised by targeted skills development through the Skills Centres.

In collaboration with the Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training, Tertiary Education Directorate and Vanuatu Qualifications Authority, the Vanuatu Skills Partnership supports increased diversity of training providers, courses and delivery modalities to increase flexibility within the skills system and promote pathways for further education.

Pacific Women supports the Vanuatu Skills Partnership to provide training for women with a focus on tourism and agribusiness. Training includes individual coaching to women to improve business skills and increase their opportunities for paid employment.

Ms Kalotiti's training equipped her with skills and knowledge to support other local artisans in the handicraft sector to generate income and help their families and communities. She now travels to different parts of the country sharing her knowledge and expertise with women artists, including to her island of Aneityum:

'When I first went back to my community in 2015 to conduct training, I knew I had the capacity to change the lives of women,' Ms Kalotiti said. 'Being well versed with my setting, I was able to confidently deliver the training in the local dialect.'

More than two years since her first training, Ms Kalotiti now returns to Aneityum every two months to measure the progress of the women artisans on the island and provide ongoing mentoring.

'There have been a lot of positive results [from the training],' said Fremden Yanhambath, Director of the Vanuatu Skills Partnership. Men in Aneityum are demonstrating increased support for the women and the community has built a local handicraft centre. The latter is a timely development as there is an increasing demand from visiting tourists to the island.

In 2018, the bi-annual Vanuatu Tourism Awards for Excellence recognised Ms Kalotiti's work, awarding her the Leadership in Handicraft award for 2017-2018. She believes that anyone, regardless of academic achievement and location, can succeed:

'As long as you have the skills, natural resources and capacity, you can turn those resources into products and start a business,' she said.