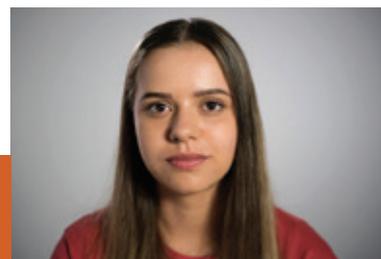




Merinda Dryden



One of the up and coming faces of Australia, 20-year-old model Merinda Dryden is a young woman passionate about improving knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture.

She was raised by relatives and foster carers from the age of three and lived in nine homes and changed schools 14 times. Sometimes she and her two siblings were able to stay together, other times they were separated. She moved out on her own in Year 12 and worked two jobs to support herself.

Now the Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Warrung woman is dedicating her life to helping other Aboriginal kids in foster care and working to more permanently enshrine Aboriginal culture and history in the curriculum.

She wants to show the world that “even though you’ve come from a rough situation you can still achieve big”, and turn extremely difficult experiences into positives.

After graduating from high school the former Miss NAIDOC (2016) worked at the Victorian Department of Justice for two years before joining the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). At VACCA she trains foster carers, residential carers and organisations working with Indigenous kids about Aboriginal culture and how past policies continue to affect people today, including the intergenerational trauma that is passed down from one generation to the next until healing occurs. “If you don’t pass on the pain you can break the cycle,” Merinda says.

Merinda started modelling four years ago but her big break came when Brazilian designer Vanessa Moe chose her to represent her collection internationally – including at Sao Paolo Fashion Week in Brazil in June 2017.

In her ‘spare time’ Merinda and her friends run youth leadership and mentoring programs for foster kids including those they’ve met at community events and younger kids they went to school with. Merinda is planning to set up her own business helping kids in foster care.

There are currently more than 15,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care in Australia.

