At the beginning of the school year, Charlene Davison and Janine French picked up the phone and called the newly appointed Aboriginal teachers embarking on their careers in the classroom. These calls, initially to offer congratulations and reassurance, were the start of an important professional relationship where teachers are encouraged to contact Charlene and Janine for support or assistance.

The calls were more than a professional courtesy. As Aboriginal liaison officer and Aboriginal project officer with the human resources directorate, Janine and Charlene are an integral part of the department's commitment to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students by increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in NSW public schools and retaining those already working there.

Along with new Aboriginal teacher recruits, 119 of which have been appointed in the past two years, the HR team is in contact with existing Aboriginal teachers, scholarship holders and Aboriginal personnel in schools and regions to further increase the awareness of employment opportunities and assist in the career development of Aboriginal staff.

The support provided to Aboriginal staff in the department reflects recommendations from the Aboriginal Education Review, which highlighted the need to increase participation and retention of Aboriginal staff in the workforce and to improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes for Aboriginal people. The general manager of human resources, Trish Kelly, emphasised the significant role that Charlene and Janine play in supporting these recommendations.

MORE SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Janine's background prepared her well for her current role, liaising with Aboriginal teachers and students on matters relating to recruitment and staffing. A recipient of a teacher education scholarship, Janine is a crucial member of the teach.NSW team. She visits groups of students in NSW universities and participates in careers fairs to promote teaching in public schools and raise awareness of the increased number of scholarships available for Aboriginal teacher education students.

"As a direct recommendation of the Aboriginal Education Review, we've effectively doubled the number of scholarships we can offer now to 60 each year," Janine said.

Growing up in Moree, education was important to her family: "Mum's a school liaison officer and has worked for the department for over 25 years," Janine said.

"Dad's career has centred around education. He instilled early in her childhood from her mother, a descendant of the Biripi people of Tarre, and her father, from the Gadigal people of the Eora nation.

One of the department's support strategies that Charlene implements is the Newly Appointed Aboriginal Teachers Orientation workshop. The most recent workshop was held in March and included teachers whom Charlene and Janine called to congratulate earlier this year.

"The workshops give the teachers the opportunity to network and share their stories and experiences, which we know will then help others," Charlene said.

The orientation workshop ensures a smooth transition from study to teaching and meets the unique needs of newly appointed Aboriginal teachers, while providing an overview of probationary and accreditation procedures, the Quality Teaching model and resources to support teaching and learning programs.

After the workshop, a teacher approached Charlene to thank her and commented that the workshop made her feel empowered and extremely proud to be a teacher and an Aboriginal person.

"I pride myself on doing the best job I can, so to know that teachers value our support makes me feel good about the job I am doing," Charlene said.

TOWARDS CULTURAL INCLUSIVENESS

Charlene highlighted other important functions of the workshops. "Principals attending the orientation workshop gain a greater understanding of the needs of newly appointed Aboriginal teachers and how to enhance cultural inclusiveness in their school, in partnership with the local community," she said.

Within her multifaceted role, Charlene most enjoys the opportunity to interact with a wide range of people within the department and from other government and community-based organisations.

"Throughout my career I have established many positive working relationships with colleagues and the wider community," she said.

"I talk with teachers on a daily basis, which I really enjoy. There are a number of teachers, in particular, whom I have developed great friendships with and who often phone me for a yarn or to tell me a great story in relation to their school and students; that's the part of the job I value most."

For more information about the department's initiatives, or for assistance for Aboriginal, contact Janine French on 9836 9263 or Charlene Davison on 9561 1210.

Applications for scholarships for Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders who wish to train as primary or secondary teachers are open from July 17 to September 22. Go to www.teach.nsw.edu.au for full details.