



SHALEEKA OZIES – Selected student Germany 2020

I pay tribute today to the Whadjuk Noongar people whose land we walk upon and to their Elders past and present and we thank them for allowing us to gather here on their land today.

My name is Shaleeka Ozies and I am a young Aboriginal Nyikina /Djugun woman from the Kimberley Region and I graduated from Belmont City College in October this year. I grew up in the Kimberley region of WA in a small town called Derby, the western gateway to the Gibb River Road, land of the boab trees and home to the largest tidal movements in the southern hemisphere. Life in Derby was adventurous. Most weekends my family would go camping, hunting, swimming or fishing or a combination of all of these. We would pack the car and head out of town to local fishing spots, stations and swimming holes. Life was great.

My parents suggested moving to Perth for school many times during years 8-9 but I didn't want to leave. However, during year 10 I suffered depression and my dad recommended a change of scenery. That's when I felt the need to change my lifestyle so a little small town girl moved to the big smoke to widen her opportunities. I felt nervous leaving home and my family but I knew it would benefit me further in my life. I had to change my lifestyle from living with my family to living in a hostel with 11 other girls who I barely knew. The hardest thing about living away from home and family is not really have that familiar support. I missed the life of a typical Kimberley girl, who wanted to fish, camp, hunt and swim her life away; but by making the leap I gained confidence in myself rather than always doubting and limiting myself.

I can't recall when my first food encounter was, but I can tell you I love food and in particular cooking. I come from a big family of 7 plus all my cousins, aunties and uncles, and we all enjoy food. While growing up I experienced food cooked traditionally, culturally and in a contemporary way. On my father's side, we are of Filipino and Aboriginal heritage and we have dishes that have been passed down through the generations that are a mix of both cultures; for an example vermicelli chicken and pork adobo using available bush spices. On my mother's side we are Aboriginal and we love preparing stews and curries cooked with traditional meats like goanna, turkey and kangaroo. Fish such as saltwater salmon and barramundi, along with crab and mussels are also favourites of my family. Don't forget the damper either.

The Kimberly region provides traditional animals and fruit bearing trees that we still hunt and gather every day from the land and sea. Food that we still prepare traditionally. With these traditional foods I love to create contemporary recipes. I love cooking because it's hands on and it allows me to be creative. I feel free and relaxed when I am in the kitchen. The understanding that I can create a meal from whatever is in the kitchen or around in nature allows me to feel artistic.

I started cooking in my early teenage years. My culinary skills were limited but with advice from my parents, grandparents and older sibling I started to understand what cooking is all about. At home I started off with the simple recipes of fried eggs and fish and assisting mum with the meals by steaming rice. During my Hospitality Certificate at school, I learnt the exact way a chef must calculate and measure food during meal preparation and this allowed me to refine my cooking skills to ensure a meal was correctly proportioned.

The work that Prepare Produce Provide do with Aboriginal youth is really significant because 67% of the world's agro- biodiversity is concentrated in lands lived on by indigenous communities. Supporting our traditional food knowledge is a crucial aspect of tackling challenges like climate change, food insecurity and inequality. PPP are passionate about changing the world... one meal at a time.

I believe my passion for the food industry will allow me to become a role model within the Kimberley community and one day become a business owner and establish relationships with other people who love the way food brings people together.