

Graduate nurse delighted to get a job close to home

By SARAH MARTIN

A LIFELONG dream has come true for Bloomfield's Emma Smith as she returns to the region as a qualified nurse.

Ms Smith, an Aboriginal woman who grew up in Ayton and attended Bloomfield River and Rossville state schools before completing high school as a boarder at Saint Monica's College, said coming home to work at the Cooktown Hospital was an amazing feeling.

"I'm so excited to be returning closer to Ayton and my family, who I know are really proud of me," she said.

Working as a nurse had been her dream since childhood, with long-time family friend Virginia Nikora, who worked as a remote nurse throughout the Cape for many years, a big role model.

"I've wanted to be a nurse for pretty much as long as I can remember," Ms Smith said.

"Just growing up in a rural and remote area and seeing how deadly the nurses like Virginia were really inspired me to pursue this career."

The young nurse completed her degree through James Cook University and had an intense start to her working life as a student nurse at Townsville Hospital throughout the pandemic.

"It was definitely a shock, especially in the heat of COVID, but it was also so surreal working during a pandemic," Ms Smith said.

"We had to wear scrubs, full PPE, cap, mask, face shield and protective gowns, gloves and shoe covers.

"It was extremely hot and uncomfortable, especially working outside in the Townsville heat in the drive through COVID testing centre during summer."

Ms Smith worked both in the testing centre and in the COVID



Emma Smith has returned to the Cape to pursue her dream career as a registered nurse.

ward, and said it was daunting at first, but also rewarding.

"I enjoyed working as a COVID nurse immensely, it was hard and challenging at times, but I'm thankful for every minute of it," she said.

"Never have I experienced so much gratitude from people who are unwell or struggling, just saying thank you for doing this."

Ms Smith said she was proud looking back on her time as a student nurse and knowing she made a difference and did her part during the pandemic.

"It was just nice to be able to

help others during such a difficult time."

Ms Smith was then accepted into the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service's registered graduate nurse program and spent a year based on Thursday Island working in the dialysis and general wards.

Ms Smith said the graduate program had opened up a lot of doors for getting into rural and remote nursing.

"The graduate program really exposed me to all the different types of cases that come through the door every day, which wouldn't

happen working in a single ward at a larger city hospital," she said.

Ms Smith has now landed a full-time position as a rural generalist nurse at Cooktown Hospital, starting this week.

TCHHS acting executive director of nursing and midwifery Sarah Worth said the health service was committed to growing its First Nations workforce.

"Emma performed exceptionally well in the program and we were thrilled to be able to offer her a position so close to her home community, who are no doubt very proud of her," she said.