



MORE THAN GUMBOOTS

BY CHRISTAL KAPOOR

What may appear to be a simple pair of gumboots carried profound meaning for James Kelekelevula Rokotakala, who proudly graduated with a Diploma in Information Technology from the Fiji National University's (FNU) National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC).

The Nakorosule, Naitasiri native stood out among the sea of graduates as he walked across the stage in a pair of white gumboots. While many in the crowd looked on in bewilderment, James' mother, Tavenisa Rokotakala, understood exactly why her son chose to forgo his newly purchased dress shoes.

"My mother raised me single-handedly and never gave up on me or my potential," James said through tears.

"There were times when she had to work incredibly hard just to fund my education. These boots were her only companion. I wear them today to dedicate my achievement not only to my mother, but to every single mother who never stops working hard for their children."

James' journey was far from easy. From a young age, he showed a natural talent for computers. After completing high school, he enrolled at the University of the South Pacific in 2018. However, his studies were interrupted when he was incarcerated in Korovou for one year and four months.

"Just because I was behind bars did not mean I stopped dreaming," he said. "My mother kept encouraging me, telling me she believed in me and would continue to support my dreams."

Determined to turn his life around, James resolved to work tirelessly once he was released and to create a better future for himself and his family.

"It was tough at first," the 30-year-old shared. "As a single parent with no formal employment, my mother had to provide not only for me but for my younger siblings as well, with me being the second youngest."

His older siblings and later his wife joined forces to help his mother to support him through his studies, a collective effort

"Just because I was behind bars did not mean I stopped dreaming"

that carried him to graduation day.

"Today, I am so proud of myself and deeply grateful to God and to everyone who helped me reach this point," James said. "I do not want my academic journey to end with a diploma. I want to go on to achieve a Master's or even a PhD in Information Technology. This is just the beginning."

James has already secured employment in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, where he will reunite with his wife and begin building a stable future—one that will also allow him to give back to the mother who sacrificed so much for him.

His message to young people who are currently incarcerated is clear and powerful:

"Being convicted is not the end of your life. The real prison is in your mind. Change your mindset, believe in yourself, submit your plans to God, and work hard towards your goals. There is always a light at the end of the tunnel."



**James Kelekelevula
Rokotakala**



Tavenisa Rokotakala gets her son, James ready for his big day. Photo credit: Christal Kapoor.

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The Fiji National University continues to maintain its Ranking with further improvement in overall scores.



Dr Ibrahim receiving the Professor Tupeni Lebaivalu Baba Special Award in Education and Social Science from Tui Macuata, Ratu Wiliame Katonivere. Photo credit: Aniket Prasad

BY NAVINESH KUMAR

The Fiji National University (FNU) has marked a historic milestone with Dr Fereal Shahenaz Ibrahim becoming the first PhD graduate from its Naiyaca Campus in Labasa—an achievement that brings pride to the University, the Northern Division and the wider Vanua Levu community.

Dr Ibrahim was also awarded the Professor Tupeni Lebaivalu Baba Special Award in Education and Social Science, which recognises excellence in doctoral research that integrates theory, philosophy and practice to address contemporary educational issues. The award honours the enduring

legacy of Professor Tupeni L. Baba and his contribution to educational thought across Fiji and the Pacific.

A Lecturer in Education at FNU under the College of Humanities, Education and Law, Dr Ibrahim's academic journey is grounded in service and a lifelong commitment to teaching. She spent 19 years as a primary school teacher before joining FNU as a part-time tutor in 2012 and later as a full-time lecturer in 2015.

Originally from Valebasoga, Labasa, Dr Ibrahim credits her upbringing for shaping her passion for education. Coming from a family of educators—both parents were teachers and her late grandfather a spiritual leader and Urdu teacher—education was central to her identity. These early influ-

ences fostered strong humanistic values, a love of learning and a deep respect for culture.

Her PhD thesis, "Indo-Fijian Muslim Notions of Place, Space and Environment: Implications for a Post-Colonial Culturally Inclusive Fijian Social Science Curriculum – A Case Study of Selected Schools in Labasa, Fiji," addresses a critical gap in Fiji's education system. Drawing on her lived experiences as an Indo-Fijian Muslim woman, former primary teacher and education lecturer, Dr Ibrahim examined how her community's perspectives are often absent from mainstream Social Science curricula.

Building on earlier research centred on Indigenous Fijian worldviews, her study brings Indo-Fijian Muslim perspectives into curriculum discourse, contributing to the development of a more culturally inclusive, post-colonial Social Science curriculum. Beyond Fiji, her work offers a framework adaptable across the Pacific to support culturally responsive education.

Reflecting on her doctoral journey, Dr Ibrahim described it as challenging yet deeply rewarding. Balancing family re-

sponsibilities, academic work and personal adversity—including disruptions caused by COVID-19—tested her resilience. She credited her faith, family, supervisors and mentors for their unwavering support.

"The most rewarding part of my journey was giving voice to culturally grounded perspectives that are often overlooked," she said.

Dr Ibrahim expressed gratitude to FNU for its support through research funding, sabbatical leave and assistance from the Centre for Graduate Studies and the Human Resources team.

Graduating in Labasa, close to her family and community, made the milestone especially meaningful. Looking ahead, she plans to contribute to curriculum development, mentor future educators and create learning experiences that strengthen students' connections to culture and identity.

As FNU celebrates this landmark achievement, Dr Ibrahim's journey stands as a powerful testament to perseverance, cultural pride and the transformative power of education—opening doors for future doctoral candidates from Naiyaca Campus and beyond.

Milestone Graduation for Labasa



Left to Right_FNU Deputy Chancellor, Dr Alisi Talatoka Vudiniabola, Vice-Chancellor, Prof Unaishi Nabobo Baba, Chief Guest at the Labasa Graduation, Minister for Lands, Honourable Filimoni Vosarogo. Photo credit: Aniket Prasad

BY WATI TALEBULA

The first graduates from Naiyaca Campus in Labasa were reminded that Fiji National University (FNU) had prepared them not only for careers, but also for service to their families, communities and the nation.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Unaishi Nabobo-Baba acknowledged the families and supporters who had walked alongside the graduates, noting that the December graduation was especially heartening due to the strong representation of women.

"To our 57 graduates, congratulations. You come from

certificate level through to doctoral level, and each of you carries a story of sacrifice and perseverance. Your FNU Vuvale is very proud of you," she said.

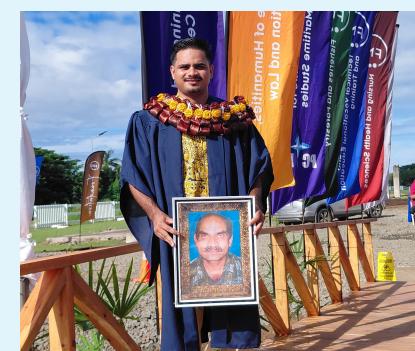
Of the 2,034 students graduating nationally, 1,222 were women, which Professor Nabobo-Baba described as a sign of hope for future leadership and community development.

Tui Macuata, Ratu Wiliame Katonivere, encouraged graduates to persevere through life's challenges, reminding them that success is built on patience and resilience.

Chief Guest and Minister for

Lands and Mineral Resources, Honourable Filimoni Vosarogo, urged graduates not to fear failure, but to fear inaction, encouraging them to become the best versions of themselves.

A highlight of the ceremony was the recognition of Dr Fereal Ibrahim, the first PhD in Education and inaugural recipient of the Professor Tupeni Baba Special Award in Education and Social Science. Dr Ibrahim described the milestone as deeply emotional and dedicated her achievement to her late father and family for their unwavering support.



Rajvir Singh on his graduation day at the FNU Naiyaca Campus Photo credit: Aniket Prasad

For My Dad

BY WATI TALEBULA

Rajvir J. Singh has proudly become the second graduate in his family from Fiji National University (FNU), after successfully completing a three-year Diploma in Architectural Drafting.

For Singh, this achievement is more than a qualification—it is a milestone built on perseverance, sacrifice, and a deep love for family.

Based in Labasa and originally from Rabi, Singh's journey began at a young age.

"I used to draw all the time," he recalled. "That's how my interest in architectural drafting started."

What began as a childhood pastime gradually evolved into a clear career pathway, guided by passion and determination.

The road was not without its challenges. Regular travel and transport costs often made the journey difficult, but Singh never lost focus.

"It wasn't easy, but I knew this opportunity was important for my future, so I stayed committed," he said.

His resilience reflects the hardworking values instilled in him by his family.

Coming from a humble background, Singh understands the importance of perseverance and gratitude. He proudly dedicates his success to his parents and siblings, who supported him every step of the way. Above all, this achievement is a heartfelt tribute to his late father.

"I really wished my dad was here to witness this moment," Singh shared emotionally. "I brought his picture with me because he is the reason I kept pushing forward."

For Rajvir, this graduation is not just for himself—it is for his dad, whose memory continues to inspire his dreams.

FNU celebrates first PhD graduate from Naiyaca Campus, Labasa

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A Grandmother's Unbreakable Determination

BY WATI TALEBULA

The moment Sereana Susu stepped onto the graduation aisle, dressed in her gown, she felt a wave of accomplishment wash over her.

This was the day she had been working towards for two and a half years—a day she had dreamed of, prayed for, and pursued with unwavering determination.

Originally from Ra, with proud maternal links to the Solomon Islands, Sereana completed her Diploma in Office Administration (Level 5), marking a significant personal achievement and the beginning of a new chapter in her life.

Looking back, Sereana describes the journey as both challenging and deeply rewarding. Balancing her studies with daily responsibilities was never easy.

As a single mother of two daughters and a grandmother to four, her responsibilities at home were as demanding as her coursework. Alongside her family commitments, she worked part-time, often managing her time hour by hour just to keep everything moving.

Yet through every late night, every moment of exhaustion, and every challenge life placed before her, she remained focused on one goal: to graduate.

“There were challenges,” she admitted.

“Raising children, caring for my grandchildren, managing the home, working, and studying at the same time—it was a lot. But giving up was never something I intended to do. I knew I was going to make it.”

She said that trusting in God carried her through the most difficult days.

“Trust in God in everything that you do—that was my motto throughout this journey,” she shared.

“I raised my children alone for more than 20 years, and I did it with the help of God.”

Sereana hopes her achievement will encourage other mothers—especially single mothers—who may feel overwhelmed or uncertain about returning to school.



Tanuku Fulfils Self-Promise



Meli Nakauvadra Tanuku. Photo credit: Nicolette Chambers.

Sereana Susu beams with pride. Photo credit: Wati Talebula

BY NICOLETTE CHAMBERS

Growing up facing the many challenges of life, Meli Nakauvadra Tanuku promised himself that one day he would become a successful individual.

He was always fascinated by graduation ceremonies and would often say, “That will be me someday.”

The young man from Bau, Yanuyanu in Tailevu is the eldest of six children and is currently employed as a Case Admission Officer at the Model Town Charitable Trust in Koroipita, Lautoka.

Tanuku recently graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Education) in Counselling from the Fiji National University’s College of Humanities, Education and Law during the FNU December Graduation Ceremony. He was also the sole graduate from the programme.

“Growing up with financial hardships, I was inspired by others who faced similar challenges. This shaped my decision to pursue counselling, to better understand people and the struggles they carry,” he said.

Despite the obstacles, he went beyond what he once thought possible. As an undergraduate, he even published academic papers with the Australian Counselling Association.

“It truly shows that if we put our trust in the Lord, we can do anything,” he added.

This achievement marks just the beginning of his journey, as Meli plans to continue his education—driven by the same determination that once helped a young boy learn to read and dream of graduation day.



Pasepa Lomani Koroitavalena.
Photo credit: Nicolette Chambers.

Mother of Two Overcomes Challenges to Graduate

BY NICOLETTE CHAMBERS

For 27-year-old Pasepa Lomani Koroitavalena of Vanuabalavu, Lau, the morning of her graduation was filled with tears of pride, relief and joy as she celebrated the completion of her Diploma in Agriculture (Level 5).

A mother of two young boys and expecting her third child in just two months, Pasepa's academic journey has been defined by perseverance and sacrifice.

She began her studies in 2020 at Fiji National University's (FNU) College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (CAFF) at the Koronivia Campus.

However, her studies were interrupted when she became pregnant with her first child.

With her husband, Nimiote, serving overseas on peacekeeping duties and limited family support available, Pasepa made the difficult decision to temporarily withdraw from her studies in order to care for her newborn.

Despite the challenges, Pasepa remained determined to complete her qualification and returned to her studies in 2024, just three months after giving birth to her second child.

"Daily prayers guided me, and being a mother and wife motivated me

to continue with my studies," she said.

Her commitment and sacrifices paid off earlier this month when she proudly graduated during the FNU December graduation ceremony, marking the culmination of years of hard work and resilience.

She described the achievement as a milestone she had long worked towards.

Looking ahead, Pasepa hopes to pursue a career with the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, where she aims to apply her agricultural training and contribute meaningfully to the sector.

A Father's Absence, A Son's *Faith*



Apenisa Rokovu (seated centre) with his family. Photo credit: Aaron Fatiaki

BY CHRISTAL KAPOOR

Apenisa Salaba Rokovu proudly walked up to the podium to receive his Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree but at the back of his mind he was trying his best to fight his tears because he missed hearing his father scream the loudest to celebrate this moment.

"Losing him right before graduation has to be one of the toughest things I have had to endure in my life," said an emotional Rokovu who is originally from Naviago in the province of Ba, unexpectedly lost his father earlier this year.

"My father was my biggest supporter. He was always there for me whenever I needed anything he always provided without ever

asking why. It really hurts me that he is not here today."

Rokovu who had to stay away from his family while completing his studies said that relying on God made the journey easier.

"I kept relying on God and the scriptures just like my father always taught me," said Rokovu.

"The Bible verse Zechariah 4:6 – It is not by might, not by power, but by my spirit says the Lord, kept me pushing forward. I knew my heavenly Father would take care of me and see me through and today I am sitting here as a testimony of what God can do."



Ann Piukala with her parents. Photo credit: Aaron Fatiaki

Answering a God-Given Calling

BY CHRISTAL KAPOOR

From the moment she discovered her love for animals as a child, Ann Margaret Piukula carried a single, unwavering dream — to become a veterinarian. Earlier this month, that dream was fulfilled when she graduated with a Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry, marking the culmination of years of perseverance, faith and quiet resilience.

Originally from Tonga, with maternal links to Rotuma, Piukula's journey was far from easy. It was shaped by personal struggles, self-doubt and moments when the finish line felt impossibly distant.

"It has taken so much to reach this point," she shared tearfully. "There were times I questioned whether I could finish the programme at all."

Needing space to regain clarity and strength, Piukula made the courageous decision to take a gap year.

"I tried to see if I could do some-

thing else," she said, "but in my heart I knew I couldn't. This was always what I wanted to do — I just needed a mental break."

She returned stronger, completing her studies and making her parents immensely proud. Her father, Honourable Paula Piukula, a Member of Parliament in the Kingdom of Tonga, watched her endure and overcome every challenge.

"This is her God-given calling," he declared.

Her mother, Fina, overcome with emotion, recalled the day she first took her daughter to enrol.

"I kept asking if she wanted to choose something else, but she was determined. Seeing her come this far fills my heart with pride."

Today, Piukula hopes her story encourages young people facing doubt to believe in themselves, remember their younger dreams, and never give up on what calls their heart.

Solomon Islander Achieves Engineering Dream

BY WATI TALEBULA

For Abraham Eby Fugui, a young man from Malaita Province in the Solomon Islands, graduating with a Bachelor of Engineering (Telecommunications & Networking) with Honours (Lower Second Class) from the Fiji National University (FNU) is more than just receiving a certificate.

It marks the culmination of years of determination, sacrifice, and resilience.

Abraham first arrived in Fiji in 2019 under a Solomon Islands Government scholarship, carrying with him a dream of pursuing a career in telecommunications.

"I feel so happy because it's like the price has now been paid off. This is what I've been working towards since I came here," Abraham said.

Although the programme is designed to be completed in four years, Abraham's academic journey extended slightly longer. After taking additional elective courses and returning home to complete his internship programme, he spent extra time finalising his studies. Despite these delays, he remained focused on completing what he had started.

Challenges Far From Home

Like many international students, Abraham faced the challenges of living away from his family, but the COVID-19 pandemic intensified these difficulties. Border

restrictions meant that he was unable to return home to the Solomon Islands for three years.

"It was quite hard," he recalled. "The programme itself was tough, and being away from family made it even harder. During COVID, we stayed here for three years without going back home."

Reflecting on his academic experience, Abraham said he prefers traditional classroom learning over remote study.

"Studying face-to-face is better because you get to meet your lecturers and ask questions directly," he said.

"Online learning was tough because you have to do everything from home, and sometimes it's difficult to stay motivated."

Having successfully navigated the challenges of studying abroad, Abraham now encourages other Solomon Islands students considering a similar scholarship pathway to remain focused and committed.

"There's no magic," he advised. "You have to work hard, be dedicated, and be passionate about what you're studying. It's very important to work hard to achieve what you want."

For Abraham, choosing FNU was an easy decision.

"I wanted to study telecommunications, and I liked how FNU designed the programme and how it was described. That's why I chose FNU."

Abraham Fugui

Lutu Sails Her Way to Become First Woman Sailor in Family



Josifini Lutu.
Photo credit: Nicolette Chambers.

BY NICOLETTE CHAMBERS

To inspire the women in her family and other women and girls has always been Josifini Lutu's goal.

Lutu graduated with a Diploma in Nautical Science (Level 5) during the Fiji National University (FNU) graduation ceremony held earlier this month at the Vodafone Arena in Suva.

She was the sole graduate in the programme, which is offered under FNU's Pacific Centre for Maritime Studies, and is also the first female sailor in her family.

The 24-year-old is originally from Dravuwalu Village in Totoya, Lau.

"I wanted to be an example to women who think that washing dishes and other

'normal duties' are all women are meant to do," she said.

"I also wanted to be an inspiration to my family because we are a family of women, and we do not have to confine ourselves to what are considered 'normal jobs' for women."

Lutu shared that it took her six years to complete her course due to several setbacks, including extended periods at sea while sailing with Swire Shipping.

"Most of the time, we would be away for six months at a time and then return to continue our studies," she explained.

She also revealed that she had to self-fund her tuition fees for her final unit in order to complete the programme.

"I had to complete my sea time with Swire Shipping while continuing my studies with the Pacific Centre for Maritime Studies," she added.

Her advice to young girls and women who dream of working on ships or pursuing careers connected to the ocean is clear and encouraging:

"If you have the determination and the willpower to see it through to the end, you can do it—and always put God first in everything you do."

I also wanted to be an inspiration to my family because we are a family of women, and we do not have to confine ourselves to what are considered 'normal jobs' for women



Adi Moala Racaca.
Photo credit: Aaron Fatiaki

BY WATI TALEBULA

At 45 years old, Katalaini Joyce Lala, known simply as "Joyce" walked across the graduation stage for the very first time.

Draped in her gown and holding back tears, she celebrated not only the completion of her Advanced Diploma of Leadership and Management, but also a powerful triumph of perseverance, sacrifice, and unwavering determination.

Joyce's journey was anything but ordinary. A proud woman from Waiqanake with maternal links to Suvavou, she was the only member of her study group living abroad.

While her classmates gathered in Fiji, Joyce joined from Samoa—sometimes from home, sometimes during work hours, and sometimes in between responsibilities

Dream Deferred, Finally Achieved

at the resort she manages and recently opened there.

"Trying to adjust my schedule to my studies and to my study group was pretty hard," she recalled.

"But I was so glad that I had a very supportive group. My study group were all sisters. We formed that bond even after the programme, and I am so blessed."

Despite the distance, the challenges, and countless late-night Zoom sessions, Joyce never gave up. She flew in from Samoa specifically to attend her graduation, an emotional moment years in the making.

For Joyce, education had long been a dream deferred. Life happened, marriage, children, work, and responsibilities—and the years quietly slipped by.

"I kept saying, 'I'll study, I'll study,' and I just kept working and working," she shared.

But last year, after briefly returning to Fiji before moving back to Samoa, something shifted.

"I said, 'Why not?' Then this programme came up, and I told myself, 'I'll do it.'"

Now, with her diploma in hand, Joyce is already looking ahead to the next step: pursuing her MBA next year.

Her story resonates deeply with mothers who often feel their dreams must wait indefinitely.

"We tend to think that when we're married and mothers with children, we don't have the time," she said.

"But we actually do have the time. We just have to make time for ourselves. If you don't try, you'll never know how far you can go."

From Football Pitch to FNU

BY ROMEKA KUMARI

It was a proud moment for Peceli Sukabula as he graduated with a Certificate in Correctional Practice (Level 5) from the Fiji National University's (FNU) College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies (CBHTS) on Tuesday, 9 December 2025.

Many people know the 23-year-old as a strong Ba football defender, but off the field he serves as a Corrections Officer with the Fiji Corrections Service.

This is his first university qualification,

and he credits it to discipline, commitment, and the values he has learnt through sport.

"This is my first university qualification, and I am very happy to achieve it through a profession I really love," Sukabula said proudly.

"With the right discipline and focus, everything is possible in life."

He said football will always be his passion, but his role as a Corrections Officer has truly shaped him.

"My job keeps me grounded. It reminds

me to be patient, humble, and responsible," he stated.

Hailing from the beautiful village of Naceva, Cicia in Lau, Sukabula shared his eagerness to further upgrade his qualification in the near future.

"This is just the start for me!" he shared.

"The 14-week course was a great learning experience. If more courses like this are offered, I will definitely enrol as I want to keep upskilling myself."



Peceli Sukabula with his Certificate in Corrections Practice (Level 5).
Photo Credit: Romeka Kumari

Graduate Dedicates Milestone to Late Father

BY ROMEKA KUMARI

For you, Dad.

These were the heartfelt words of Rajveer Singh as he proudly graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in Banking, from FNU's College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies (CBHTS) on Tuesday, 9 December 2025.

For Singh, the ceremony was far more than an academic milestone — it was a deeply emotional tribute to his late father, Satendra Singh, whom he lost at a young age.

"It's a really special moment for

me, and I really miss my dad," he said, fighting back emotion.

Despite the immense void left by his father's passing, Singh said the tragedy never derailed him from his goals. Instead, it strengthened his resolve, anchored by the unwavering support of his mother, Sangeeta Singh.

"This is for him and for my mum, who has been the pillar of strength ever since my dad passed away."

Singh spoke fondly of the sacrifices his mother made, describing how she stepped into

both parental roles to raise him and his siblings. Her resilience and determination, he said, became the driving force behind his success.

"I always looked forward to celebrating this day with my family, remembering the sacrifices my mother made and how she took on the role of a father as well to bring us up," he shared.

As he walked across the stage to receive his degree, Singh carried not only his own dreams, but also the legacy of his father — and the strength of the mother who helped him reach this proud moment.



Rajveer Singh.
Photo credit: Romeka Kumari

Tongan Prison Officers Break Barriers

BY ROMEKA KUMARI

Two Tongan prison officers, Taise Manu'atu and Mele Stewart, have set new standards after breaking barriers in a field traditionally dominated by men.

Both graduated with a Certificate in Corrections Practice (Level 5) from the Fiji National University (FNU) on Tuesday, 9 December 2025.

The duo were the only women and the first regional students among the 57 graduates in the inaugural cohort under the College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies (CBHTS).

Twenty-year-old Taise Manu'atu, who hails from Alakifonua in Tonga, is the fourth youngest among her nine siblings.

"I am thrilled to have come to Fiji to take part in this 14-week course," Manu'atu said.

"Many women in our country do not

prefer working as prison officers, as the field is heavily dominated by our male counterparts."

"I want to show that women can do this job too. We can serve our country with strength and dignity."

Mele Stewart, who hails from Navutoka in Tonga, added that this qualification is a stepping stone for her and provides a clear pathway for further academic and professional development.

"This programme has equipped me with essential knowledge and practical skills necessary for an effective and professional career in corrections."

"Over the course, I have learnt operational protocols, communication skills, ethics, and safety practices, preparing me for the responsibilities and challenges I may encounter in my role."



(from left) Tongan prison officers, Taise Manu'atu and Mele Stewart graduate from FNU. Photo credit: Romeka Kumari

Tarogi Inspired by Mother

BY CHRISTAL KAPOOR

Laisasa Ratumaiyale Tarogi is known for defying all odds in his unwavering passion to serve his people.

Hailing from Yawe in Kadavu, Tarogi became widely recognised for his dedication while serving as the District Nurse at Narokorokoyawa Nursing Station in the Naitasiri highlands.

For five years, he traversed rugged terrain on horseback to reach remote communities, often in challenging conditions, driven by an unshakeable commitment to care for those most in need. Recently transferred to Valelevu Health Centre, Tarogi chose once again to challenge himself by returning to his alma mater, Fiji National University, after nine years.

He enrolled in the Postgraduate Diploma in Nursing (Community Health Nursing) and graduated with flying colours, earning the programme's gold medal.

Known for his bright and bubbly personality, Tarogi humbly attributes his success to one person above all others:

his adoptive mother.

"I learned to work hard from a young age from my mother," said Tarogi. "I would watch her wake up before everyone else each morning, and she would wake me too, encouraging me to study even before the school day began."

He fondly recalls evenings spent doing his homework while his mother sat beside him, weaving mats late into the night to help support his education.

"There were times when I would get stuck and ask her questions. Even if she did not know the answer, she would tell me to mark it and make sure I asked my teachers the next day."

Her quiet sacrifices and constant encouragement, he says, shaped the foundation of his academic and professional journey.

"Her presence and encouragement have had such a great impact on my life. I am who I am today because of her," Tarogi shared.

While Tarogi may now stand at the top of his field, decorated with accolades and achievements, in his heart he remains his mother's child—still learning from her example every single day.



Laisasa Tarogi (centre) with his mum (left) and loved ones.

Photo credit: Aaron Fatiaki

Dr. Narayan's Journey of Excellence

BY WATI TALEBULA

Dr Nikish Narayan, a proud native of Lautoka, has reached an extraordinary milestone in his medical career, securing both the prestigious Award of Excellence—a gold medal—from the Fiji National University (FNU) and the Master's Award from the joint colleges of the Australian and New Zealand Anaesthetic Societies.

These honours mark the culmination of years of dedication, sacrifice, and perseverance through the demanding Master of Medicine in Anaesthesia programme.

Standing among fellow graduates, Dr Narayan described the moment as one filled with gratitude.

"I feel very privileged and honoured to receive these awards. I think they reflect the dedication and hard work required to complete these programmes," he said.

Balancing the Workload: Challenges and Triumphs

The path to becoming a specialist in anaesthesia is never easy, and for Dr Narayan, one of the greatest challenges was finding a balance between clinical responsibilities and academic expectations.

"Balancing clinical work and academic work was tough," he explained.

"What helped me was seeking guidance from mentors and friends, managing my time effectively, and prioritising my academic commitments."

Despite the hurdles, his determination and strong support system kept him moving forward.

A Village Behind the Victory

Dr Narayan was quick to acknowledge the many people who played a vital role in his success.

"I would personally like to acknowledge my mother and my sister, who have always supported my education," he said.

He also expressed deep appreciation for his colleagues in the Anaesthesia Department at Lautoka Hospital, his lecturers, and his fellow Master's students who journeyed alongside him.

His father, who passed away in 2022, re-



Dr Nikish Narayan.
Photo credit: Luke Salababa

mains a central source of inspiration.

"He was someone I always looked up to. He supported my work and my academic achievements. It's unfortunate that he's not here today, but I know he's watching."

Dr Narayan also credited two remarkable mentors for inspiring him throughout the programme: Dr Lisa Bennett from the Fiji National University Anaesthesia and Intensive Care Medicine faculty, and Dr Megan Walmsley of the Australian Anaesthetic Society.

"Their work ethic and academic contributions inspired me throughout this programme," he said.

Supported by Generosity Beyond Borders

Dr Narayan's academic journey was also made possible through financial support at a time when funding was limited. The New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists, through its PACT Scholarship, funded his tuition and enabled him to continue his studies.

"The anaesthetic societies from our neighbouring countries stepped in to help when funding was limited. Their generosity fulfilled my dream of becoming an anaesthetist, and I am truly grateful," he said.

With his Master's degree now completed, Dr Narayan is preparing for the next phase of his professional journey.

"I'm looking to undertake an attachment and obtain my specialist registration. That will be my focus over the next few years."

A Year of Triumph

BY WATI TALEBULA

A registered nurse from Tuvalu has successfully completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Midwifery at Fiji National University. This achievement represents a significant milestone, not only in his professional journey but also in his personal life.

For Failauga Jessy Tanieli, the moment is one filled with deep gratitude, joy and pride after an intense year of study away from home.

"Today I feel so glad, so happy and excited that we have made it through the year of study. I am very joyful," he shared.

Failauga described completing the programme as the realisation of a long-held dream — one that required resilience and determination. Being separated from family and familiar surroundings was challenging, yet his commitment to serving his people kept him focused throughout the journey.

"There were many challenges in student life, but we managed to overcome them. What makes me happiest today is that I have achieved what I set out to do," he said.

His accomplishment comes at a critical time for Tuvalu, which continues to face a shortage of qualified midwives. Motivated by this pressing need, Failauga is determined to return home and make a meaningful difference, providing skilled and compassionate care to mothers and newborns in his community.

He plans to apply the knowledge and hands-on experience gained through his studies to strengthen maternal and child health services in Tuvalu, contributing to safer births and healthier futures for families across the nation.

Looking ahead, Failauga hopes to further upgrade his qualifications, firmly believing that continuous learning is key to building stronger health systems.

Health & Hustle

Mighty McKay

BY WATI TALEBULA & CHRISTAL KAPOOR

Brian John McKay, proudly from Vagadaci in Levuka with maternal ties to Naselai in Taveuni, recently celebrated a significant milestone in his educational journey.

A former student of Gospel High School, Brian successfully completed the CISCO programme at Fiji National University, proving that determination and resilience can overcome even the greatest of challenges.

Born with both hands shorter than those of most people, Brian has faced obstacles that many might find overwhelming. Yet he has never allowed his circumstances to define his abilities or limit his dreams. Instead, they have shaped his character, strengthened his humility, and fuelled his unwavering desire to succeed.

"The programme makes me feel normal," Brian shared. "I look forward to doing the work, especially being the way I am. Studies can be hard, but with the support I received from my loved ones and lecturers, it went well. I really enjoyed taking this course."

Beyond the classroom, Brian is also a dedicated athlete, proudly representing Team Fiji in the 100-metre and 200-metre sprints, as well as the long jump. He is currently training with the goal of competing at the Paralympics next year — a dream he is pursuing with the same discipline and determination that carried him through his studies.

Juggling academic commitments with intense training schedules was often exhausting. There were days when his body was tired and his spirit tested. Yet Brian never gave up. Through the unwavering support of his family, friends, and lecturers, he found the strength to push forward.

"There were times when I felt exhausted, but I never gave up because my family always had my back and believed in me," Brian said. "Seeing how far I've come fills me with gratitude, because it is all through the grace of God."

His faith and the encouragement of his parents sustained him during the most challenging moments, reminding him to keep pushing forward and work hard

so he could stand on his own two feet.

Brian's message to others is heartfelt and sincere: "Don't be ashamed. Be yourself. Be humble."

He dedicates his certificate to the pillars of his life — his parents and his grandmother, whose unwavering love, belief, and encouragement have guided him to this moment of triumph.

Brian believes that true strength does not come from physical ability, but from perseverance, resilience, and an unshakeable spirit — qualities that continue to drive him forward, both on the track and in life.

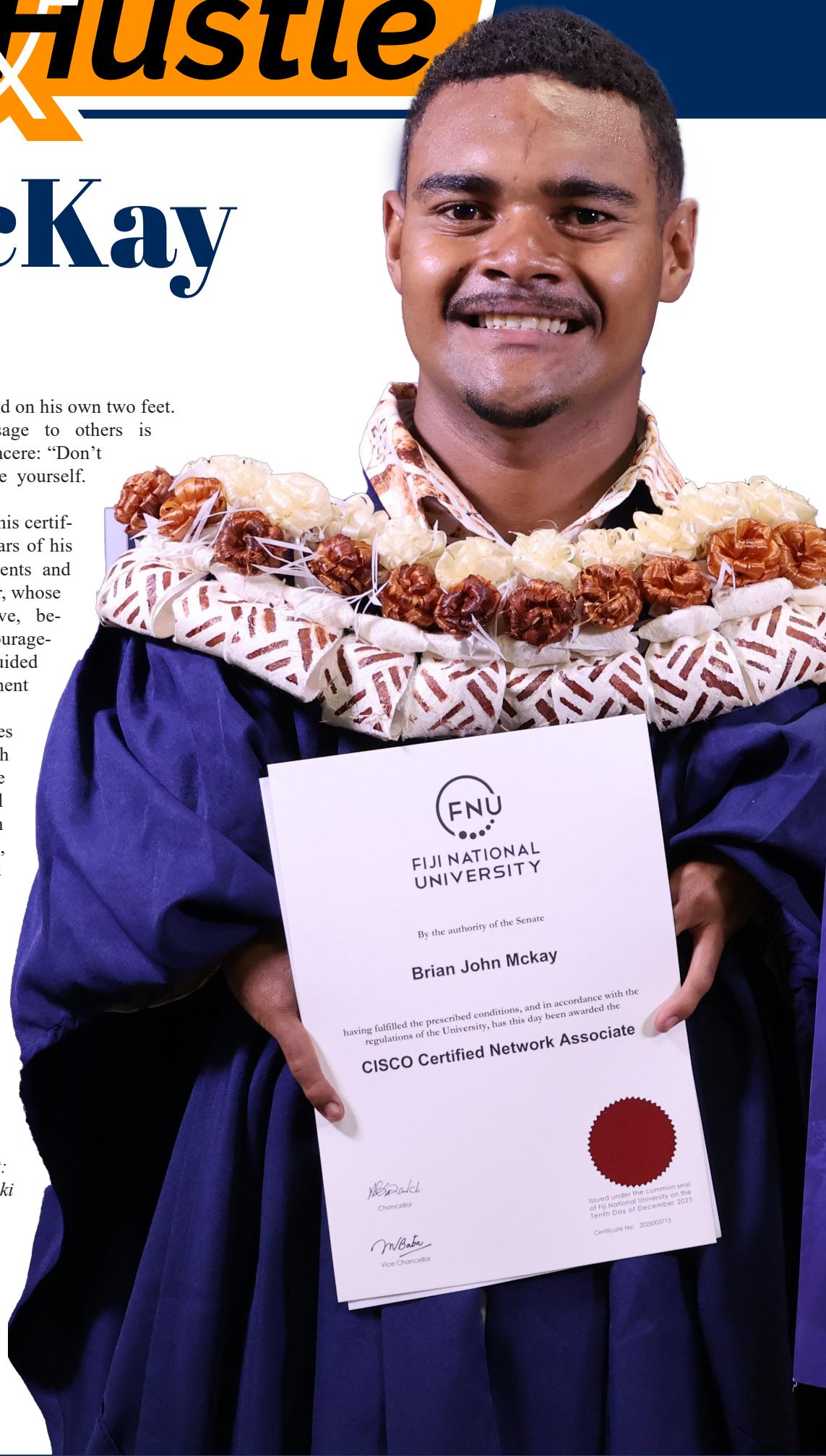
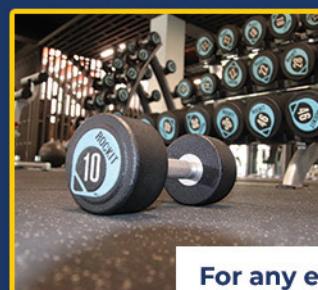


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Aaron Fatiaki



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INSIDE FNU welcomes submissions by staff and students for publication in the newsletter. Please send your suggestions, comments or articles for consideration to mprc@fnu.ac.fj

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