Lynne looks after her people by focusing on health issues

IT IS Aboriginal culture to look after your people, and through her nursing, Lynne Stuart aims to do just that.

She comes from a family of nurses; her mother, of the Mandandani tribe in the Maranoa district, was a nurse, as is her older sister.

And it was through nursing that Ms Stuart came into first contact with traditional Aborigines in the Northern Territory, an experience that brought her closer to her roots, but one which was also saddening. "It was a real eye-opener," Ms Stuart, now a nursing tutor of indigenous students at the University of Southern Queensland, said.

"I could not imagine that people in a progressive society could actually exist like that without people doing anything about it."

In Katherine, people of every age group were dying of preventable and manageable illnesses because they had no access to treatment the rest of society took for granted.

And whatever programs were in place to reverse the shocking statistics were not working.

After leaving the Northern Territory, Ms Stuart realised there was a great need to increase the number of indigenous nurses in Australia so they could look after their people.

Over the years she has worked with other health professionals to recruit and train indigenous nurses. At USQ, Ms Stuart now works with undergraduates and will this year see five achieve their Bachelor of Nursing.

"My aspiration is for the health status of indigenous people to equal to that of non-indigenous people in Australia," she said.

"If you look after your people, the outcomes are better."