

Giving back via indigenous policy



GREG BROWN

Indigenous university student Jerome Pang wants to dedicate his career to influencing policy that will improve the lives of Aboriginal people in regional Australia.

Mr Pang, from the Queensland mining city of Mount Isa, says he wants to give back to the community that has given him opportunities to live a fulfilled life.

When he was 14, he received a scholarship to Brisbane school Marist College Ashgrove, via the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, of which *The Australian* is an official partner.

"It moved my life in a different direction," Mr Pang said. "I've had more opportunities now. I'm going to university."

"What I want to do in life is give back. I want to work on indigenous policy — to have an indigenous person actually working on indigenous policy that will benefit my people, especially in the Mount Isa region and the Gulf of Carpentaria, where my mum's family is from."

The 23-year-old, who is under-



GARY RAMAGE

Jerome Pang

taking a degree in indigenous policy at Griffith University in Brisbane, said health and education outcomes need to improve in Aboriginal communities.

"I want to be a voice so my people can improve their own lives and empower themselves; regarding their career opportunities and regarding their own health," Mr Pang said.

In his final year of high school, in 2013, he was the winner of the "If I was Prime Minister" video competition for indigenous students. He said in the video that he would create more government initiatives for higher education

and private schools for indigenous youth if he were prime minister.

He travelled to Canberra and met the country's then leader Tony Abbott as a result of winning the video competition.

With the Closing the Gap report due for release today, Mr Pang says it is frustrating when politics gets in the way of improving the lives of indigenous Australians.

"I think every indigenous person gets frustrated with politics but my personal opinion is you can be screaming on the outside but if you get on the inside you can make all the changes," he said.

"So I think it takes many more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people saying: 'I want to have a go at getting into these institutions and making the policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and not have it made by non-indigenous people.'"

Mr Pang added that the proposal for an indigenous voice to parliament should be given "strong consideration".

He hoped Australians would take more interest in the history and livelihoods of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

"If you are ignorant of indigenous issues and people, then it is up to you to get to know (more), because this is the oldest continuous living civilisation in the world and we are Australians," he said.