



STUART McEVOY

Neerim Callope with his father, Djunagur, in Melbourne

An inspired choice to show power of learning



JESSICA CORTIS

Neerim Callope grew up in the cattle town of Normanton in northern Queensland where, after Year 7, students had to dial in to their classes and listen to their teacher over a radio or internet connection.

That's when Mr Callope's father, Djunagur Callope, decided to send him 850km away to finish high school at St Augustine's College in Cairns on an Australian Indigenous Education Foundation scholarship.

Nine years later, Neerim, 26, is half-way through a psychology degree at the University of Melbourne and has been selected to address the 2019 AIEF graduating class on Monday, with his proud father watching on.

"To be able to inspire the next

generation of students with my old man by my side is a privilege," Mr Callope said. "It's a chance for two strong Aboriginal men to be able to show people the power of progress."

Mr Callope knew he wanted to be a psychologist in the Aboriginal community after his friends began confiding in him.

"I had friends during school that used to lie on my couch and share their thoughts and feelings with me about adjusting to life away from the bush we knew," he said. "A lot of indigenous people leave their communities to go to boarding school and we all have a desire to come back and give back to the community."

He is working as a data analyst at the Crime Statistics Agency while he finishes his degree and said it had made him aware of the "complex issues indigenous people face".

Djunagur Callope said it was important that Aboriginal people derived their identity from country, community and family, "but be able to transition between that knowledge base and the knowledge base of the Western world".