

Aboriginal scholars want to give back to community

KIERAN GAIR

When Vivica Turnbull leaves Bourke in northwest NSW to go bush with her mum, they always stop by Gundabook Hill. The proud Barkindji pair can spend hours staring in wonder at the ancient caves covered in Aboriginal rock art believed to be many thousands of years old.

In these sacred moments shared, 17-year-old Vivica feels an unspoken duty to preserve the stories of her ancestors, and the rugged land that gave them life.

"I want to study environmental science and help pass on the knowledge that my mum has passed onto me," she says. "My dream is to be a conservationist."

As she nears the end of her time as a boarder at Sydney girls' school Loreto Normanhurst, her



dream is closer. "I'm really excited about going to university," she says. Vivica is a beneficiary of an Australian Indigenous Education Foundation scholarship, which have helped more than 700 children finish Year 12 since the program was established in 2008.

AIEF offers scholarships to indigenous students in financial need, from more than 400 communities across the country, to study at leading schools and universities. And its success is growing. According to the AIEF's annual report, the scholarships supported 400 students last year.

Vivica isn't the only indigen-



ADAM YIP

Vivica Turnbull, 17, Maria Treacy, 17, and Sarah Scott, 18

ous student at Loreto Normanhurst who has her sights set on a leading university. Maria Treacy, a Kija and Ngarinyin girl from

Broome, is Loreto's first indigenous vice-captain and wants to study nursing so she can use her "privilege to give back".

"I want to make my tribe proud," she says. "Coming to Loreto in Year 7 was the biggest challenge I've ever faced, but it's also an incredible opportunity."

"I'm passionate about health-care and I love kids, so my aim is to study nursing so I can come back to help indigenous communities in the Kimberley."

Sarah Scott, 18, a Kamilaroi woman from Bourke, will also graduate from Loreto this year. Inspired by her experience as the school's first indigenous liturgy captain, she plans to study social work at the University of NSW.

Sarah says many indigenous girls in Bourke grow up surrounded by poverty and drug use, and that "it's an uphill battle" to turn trauma into triumph.

Like her classmates, she wants to use her scholarship to give back to her community.