



BRIAN CASSEY

Warren Mundine talks with St Monica's AIEF students Delphina Day (year 10) and LaShontae Owens-Edwards (year 11)

Scholarships lift Indigenous youth

NOAH YIM

High school student Kibbim Titassey, 16, has the world at his feet, soon to graduate from a prestigious private school and pursue a career in medicine.

Kibbim, vice-captain at St Augustine's College in Cairns, can barely contain his excitement as he talks about his dream to study medicine at the University of Queensland after he graduates.

It is a remarkable difference from where he was at the end of primary school.

He recalls that one of the first things he noticed when he came to St Augustine's was how commonly people around him wore shoes. "I never used to wear shoes," he said.

Kibbim hails from the Muraglag people in the Torres Strait Islands and received a scholar-



ship from the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF) to attend St Augustine's.

He is one of 30 at the school – and more than 1200 across the country since the scholarship's inception in 2008 – who have received support from the organisation to attend leading high schools and universities. He says that before receiving it he could never have imagined he would one day study medicine.

"I wanted to be some big rugby player," Kibbim said.

"Without (the AIEF scholarship) I wouldn't be attending St Augustine's. It's given me the financial help I needed to attend

school and the opportunities that came with it."

He and his 29 peers received AIEF scholarships to study at St Augustine's and St Monica's, the sister school for girls.

The scholarships cover tuition, room and board, and miscellaneous expenses such as school uniforms by funding the shortfall of means-tested parental contributions.

Kibbim started at the school in 2017 with cousin Amelya See Kee, 17, who was also awarded a scholarship. They said starting together made the transition easier.

AIEF chair Warren Mundine, who was in Cairns on Thursday to meet the students and take a tour of the school, attributed the success of the organisation to the passion of everyone involved.

"It comes from me, the board, and everyone else within the organisation," Mr Mundine

said. "We all want to be here."

The program has been operating for 14 years and some of its first alumni are returning to the organisation as young professionals to lend a hand.

"We've got two people on our board now who have gone through the program – gone off and done law, and one of them is in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade," Mr Mundine said. "There's a bloke who's very high up in HSBC and he's very keen to come on the board at some stage."

It boasts an impressive track record; in 2021 it had a 94 per cent year 12 completion rate.

Mr Mundine said the program was vital to making change for Indigenous Australians. "If we're really going to make change, there're a couple of things we have to do. Job one, of course, is education. This is the future."