

Bush medicine: Inspirational Indigenous brothers are future doctors

By IMOGEN REID, JOURNALIST
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For indigenous brothers Injarra and Unngoorra Harbour, the inspiration to study medicine is driven by a passion to preserve the leadership and legacy of Aboriginal elders who are dying too young.

Coming from a family with no medical background, the pair's interest in closing the mortality gap between indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians developed through lengthy discussions with relatives about their experiences in rural communities in central-west Queensland.



Brothers Injarra, left, and Unngoorra Harbour at St Joseph's Nudgee College. Picture: Glenn Hunt

The brothers, who grew up in Winton, said because the leaders of communities were dying too early, the younger generation was left behind with a loss of identity and culture.

"A high portion of the mortality gap is due to chronic conditions and if there is an earlier intervention the rate of deaths would decline," 22-year-old Unngoorra said. "With that increase in life expectancy of our elders, there will be stronger leaders in our community."

According to the federal government's Closing The Gap 2020 report, life expectancy for Indigenous males living in remote Australia is estimated to be 6.2 years less than indigenous males in major cities and 6.9 years less for indigenous females.

"We will create a stronger direction for our younger people if our elders are around," Unngoorra said. The brothers are recipients of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation Scholarship, which secured them spots at St Joseph's Nudgee College in Brisbane.

Their journey into medicine was made easier through the initiative, which supports more than 1000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students nationwide. The foundation's scholarship program helps students get education at boarding schools and universities, while a separate pathways program provides career support.

Unngoorra is graduating from the Queensland University of Technology next month with a Bachelor of Biomedical science. He has accepted an offer to study postgraduate medicine at the University of Queensland, where Injarra, 17, hopes to study.

The brothers want to give back to the indigenous community by working in medicine in remote communities in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Injarra, who is in his final year at school, said the AIEF scholarship had made looking at opportunities outside school "a lot easier, which has made my journey into medicine clearer. It has refined my vision and what I want to do after school."



From left: Koolee, Tracey, Injarra, Unngoorra and Travis Harbour at St Joseph's College Nudgee in Brisbane. Picture: Glenn Hunt

Featuring in Sky's program, Changing Our Nation, premiering Thursday 10 December at 7pm AEDT, Injarra said he hoped the show would help dismantle stereotypes perpetuated through Australia's national narrative.

"I think there has been a huge misrepresentation of indigenous youth in the media in recent years," he said.

"There is a stigma surrounding youth in our communities, particularly boys, so I hope it will give insight into indigenous youth around Australia and what good we are contributing to the community."

The documentary, following the lives of Australia's brightest indigenous students, celebrates the power of education and the impact it has on the wider community.

AIEF Executive Director Andrew Penfold AM said with the support of the nation the foundation will continue to "nurture" the next generation of young indigenous leaders.

"AIEF works to support indigenous families and communities across the country who, recognising the transformative power of education, want the opportunity and choice to provide a better future for their children," he said.

He said getting to see the stories of these students come to life through the documentary had been a "privilege".

The foundation has seen AIEF students and alumni realise outstanding outcomes in indigenous education and employment, with success consistently over 90 per cent annually.

"I've been seeing this for over 12 years now with AIEF, as young indigenous students seize the opportunities before them and have an immense impact, not just on their families, but on all those around them," Mr Penfold AM said.

Sky News Australia Chief Executive Paul Whittaker said the AIEF scholarship program was one of the most successful of its kind in Australia.

"The results of which can be seen through the remarkable achievements of the students and the profound and positive impact the program is having on them, their families and communities," the AIEF Ambassador said.

Watch 'Changing Our Nation', Thursday 10 December at 7:00pm AEDT on Sky News on Foxtel and Sky News on WIN. Visit [skynews.com.au/changingournation](https://www.skynews.com.au/changingournation) to meet the students and watch the sneak peek of the Changing Our Nation special documentary.



Injarra and Unngoorra Harbour at St Joseph's College Nudgee in Brisbane. Picture: Glenn Hunt