

## Kids get chance to be Australia's first Indigenous PM

**A unique scholarship scheme is giving First Nations kids the chance to pursue their dreams in the nation's top schools.**

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Take a group of kids from regional and remote Aboriginal communities, give them the chance to study at some of the country's elite boarding schools and universities and you have the making of Australia's first indigenous prime minister.

That's the view of Indigenous Affairs Minister Ken Wyatt, in a new documentary that underlines how equalising access to education can propel people from any background right to the top.

Over the past 10 years, the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF) has been helping First Nations youngsters pursue their dreams with scholarships in the nation's top schools.

The program started in 2008 with one student in NSW and now supports nearly 400 students in every state and territory.

To date more than 1000 youths have experienced life-changing opportunities thanks to the scholarships. The new documentary by Sky News, *Changing Our Nation*, takes us on an inspirational one-hour journey with some of the AIEF's trailblazers.

Mr Wyatt, who appears in the show, hails the scholarship program a game changer. "Ultimately, out of these programs will come the next set of leaders, of which one will become the first indigenous prime minister of this country," Mr Wyatt emphatically declares.

Andrew Penfold, the AIEF's executive director, said the program recognises the transformative power of education.

"Education's always been the path out of disadvantage or (towards) improvement of society throughout human history; doesn't matter what race, colour or creed, education is the silver bullet in my view," he says. The students couldn't agree more.

### INJARRA HARBOUR FROM WINTON, QLD

Injarra Harbour has marked his place in history by becoming the first indigenous school captain at Brisbane's elite St Joseph's Nudgee College.

The 17-year-old left his home in the remote town of Winton to take up an AIEF scholarship at the boarding school in Year 7, where fees start at more than \$30,000 a year (Year 5 to 6 for tuition and boarding)

This year he graduated and is hoping to study medicine at UQ and become a doctor in rural indigenous communities.

"I think I've drawn from my own life experience and having to come from a remote community; my old people have really legitimised my purpose in life in becoming a medical doctor," he said.



Injarra Harbour says there is no way he could have afforded a place at St Joseph's Nudgee College without the support of the AIEF. *Source: Supplied*

“My grandparents were forced to work on stations since they were 10 years old and never got the opportunity to attend school so I am so grateful they stressed the importance of getting an education; and my parents too reinforced and really lived out the educational journey with me because I think they really recognise education as a tool to break down the barriers forced on indigenous people.”



Injarra Harbour, pictured with his parents, is on his way to becoming a doctor. Source: Supplied

Injarra acknowledges there’s no way he could have afforded a place at Nudgee College and his school was good but limited in comparison.

“The first thing that I noticed between Nudgee was at Winton we had combined grades in classes because there are so few students. And then I went to Nudgee and one class was the same amount of people,” he says.

“In order for me to fulfil my dream and my vision I needed to go to a place that was capable of enabling my education: financially we would not have been able to afford it but I think AIEF has taken a tremendous job by providing opportunity to go to these schools because again its about how to give kids the best possible education.”

## AMELYA AND LILLY SEE KEE FROM THURSDAY ISLAND

Amelya and Lilly See Kee are boarding at St Monica’s College in Cairns on AIEF scholarships. The sisters left their family and beach life on Thursday Island to pursue their dreams. They admit it was very hard at the start and they do miss their small community.

“I felt very anxious being a new pupil. Leaving home was really hard, especially being away from most of my family,” said Amelya, now in Year 10.

“I felt really nervous because I was leaving a really small school and coming somewhere a lot bigger,” said Lilly, now in Year 8.

The sisters, two of eight children, took inspiration from older siblings who left home to study at “bigger schools”.

Amelya is studying towards becoming a primary school teacher. “My mum is a prep and pre-pep teacher. She helps give them a good start and I would really like to do that,” she said.

Lilly also wants to work with kids as a paediatrician and give back to remote communities. “When I was little I met a really nice doctor and after that I became really interested in the human body,” she said.

“I will probably go rural for some of the time because their health care isn’t as good as in the city and some places don’t even have specialist doctors so I think it’s really important to go out there and help.”



Amelya and Lilly See Kee want to give back to remote and regional communities when they join the workforce. Source: Supplied

## ASPEN MOORE FROM DUBBO, NSW



Aspen Moore left her home in Dubbo to take up boarding school on an AIEF scholarship last year. The 14-year-old is in Year 8 at Sydney’s top-ranking Pymble Ladies’ College, where Middle School tuition fees start at more than \$30,000 a year.

She admits her mum was shocked when she told her she wanted to go to boarding school but it was an opportunity she couldn’t miss.

Aspen Moore hopes to study medicine. Source: Supplied

“Mum was a little bit shocked. It was something different that my mum hasn’t experienced before. I saw the scholarship and thought ‘how about I just apply and see what happens’,” she said.

Two years on and Aspen, who this week won the school’s Citizenship Award, said there's no looking back. “It’s definitely a huge opportunity, I’m so happy that I managed to make this scholarship and I am very grateful as well,” she told News Corp.

“It’s definitely boosted my confidence because there are so many more opportunities here and there are so many things to do; it’s definitely opened my eyes a lot that anything is possible and I can achieve whatever I want to achieve.”

Aspen’s dream is to finish Year 12 and go on to study medicine. “I want to go back to the country and give back to the rural community. It would be such a rewarding experience as well,” she said.

## **KIRRAH STOTHERS FROM KATHERINE, NT**



Kirrah Stothers wants to become a human rights lawyer. Source: Supplied.

Kirrah Stothers dreams of one day becoming a human rights lawyer and giving back to her community.

The 17-year-old from Katherine, Northern Territory, is studying at Adelaide’s prestigious Seymour College on an AIEF scholarship where fees for Senior School start at more than \$26,000 a year.

Next year she enters Year 12 with the aim of going on to study for a degree in law and international relations.

“I’m really interested in human rights and helping people,” she said.

“I think First Nation representation in human rights needs to be picked up a lot; when we think about not only in Australia but indigenous people all over the planet nobody knows the struggles of their own kind, I guess. Even in Australia and New Zealand there are things we can improve.”

Kirrah says leaving her family and home for boarding school in Year 10 was “really, really scary” but the opportunities the school has opened up makes it worth it.

“My previous school was very much maths and science-based; I’m not a maths genius and I despise science so much I was getting disinterested in school,” she told News Corp.

Moving interstate, she said, was “really, really scary”. “I was leaving a place I had known since I was six years old and I had never left that community my entire life so I felt really alone and scared.

“Once I got to Seymour I was really in my shell for a few weeks but ... one day I was in the locker room and this girl came up to me and asked me where I was from and I made friends with her friends and then other friends.” There were only four indigenous students at the school when she started and that figure has grown to about seven.

Kirrah hopes to inspire the next generation of young indigenous children to follow in her footsteps. “If we have our young people going into school, it can only create more positive change,” she said.

Fox Sports presenter Yvonne Sampson, who hosts the documentary, paid tribute to the students’ drive and dedication. “It was such a privilege to meet these amazing young people. Their determination and commitment is so inspiring. I can’t wait for our viewers to hear their stories and see for themselves why the work being done by the foundation is so important,” she said.

**Changing Our Nation premieres Thursday, 10 December at 7pm AEDT on Sky News on Foxtel and regional free-to-air channel Sky News on WIN.**