

Flourishing in culture of empowerment



JOHN FEDER

‘The program made me a leader, not just in my family but for all the kids who see my story and think if she can do it, so can I’: Latiesha Dunbar

SAM KING

From becoming the first high school graduate in her family to a university degree and a stint in Los Angeles, Latiesha Dunbar says she can trace the best decision she ever made back to a traffic light in Brisbane.

“My family and I were on a holiday and we stopped at a traffic light. I remember seeing a group of school students in blazers, formal uniforms, black polished shoes, all of that,” she said.

“I remember thinking they looked like they had a bright future ahead of them, and that’s what I wanted.” Growing up in Darwin to Ab-



original and Torres Strait Islander parents, she saw education as her ticket to see the world, but getting there was easier said than done.

When the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation offered her a scholarship to Brisbane boarding school St Peter’s Lutheran College, she seized it with both hands. “I remember my meeting with them so clearly – I felt like this was my chance at the opportunity of a lifetime. I took it so seriously I wrote two full pages of

notes the night before.” After graduating in 2012, she studied a bachelor of media and communications at Queensland University of Technology before starting a career in the media industry. “Looking back at that little girl from Darwin, I have had so many incredible opportunities. It has been so rewarding in so many ways,” she said.

“It’s so important for our community and culture, being able to go to these universities and take up these spaces where our voices really need to be heard, and I’m still so grateful for it.”

In the decade since graduating, Ms Dunbar has seen AIEF’s program rapidly expand and provide pathways for Indigenous students

to excel. The foundation now offers 350 scholarships across 27 schools and universities around the country, 43 per cent of which in 2021 went to students from remote communities.

“After four years of boarding school, I was one of 28 AIEF students to successfully graduate high school, and now there are about 900 graduates from all around the country,” Ms Dunbar said.

Her younger siblings followed her lead to Brisbane, with her brother studying at St Joseph’s Nudgee College and her sister at St Margaret’s.

“AIEF’s program made me a leader, not just in my own family but for all the kids who see my

story and think ‘If she can do it, so can I’.

“I have that responsibility to continue to lead the way. I have two little boys of my own now and because of the opportunities AIEF has given me, I’m able to give the same to them.”

The foundation’s executive director, Andrew Penfold, said Ms Dunbar’s story demonstrates the power of education.

“Seeing strong, well-educated, articulate and passionate young Indigenous leaders with a voice, like Latiesha, is inspiring,” he said.

“AIEF exists to support these young people to amplify their voice so they are able to contribute to the policies and debates of the future.”