



LYNDON MECHIELSEN

Jemmason Power, left, and Kiah Bobongie both say they have benefited by being given AIEF scholarships to private schools

Blood, sweat and tears a price worth paying



AUSTRALIAN
INDIGENOUS
EDUCATION
FOUNDATION

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THE first thing Jemmason Power noticed about her new private boarding school was its size.

Three of its grades would incorporate the entire population of the state high school in her home town of Bowen in northern Queensland. The second thing was higher standards. The school day was longer and the teachers expected her to do more work.

"In my first years of high school in Bowen, I could do less work, a variety of sports and extra-curricula activities and still get As and Bs in class," she said.

"But when I moved schools, it was more intense, the class work and assignments were of a higher standard and more challenging."

Completing her final two years of school at St Peters Lutheran

College in Brisbane, Jemmason, 17, graduated this year with an OP score of 10, equivalent to an ATAR score of 80, and has applied to study communications at the University of Queensland.

Her academic success follows her triumph as a goal-shooter on the netball court, selected for the Australian netball squad earlier this year and sent to train at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra. The year has brought her closer to her dream of combining a career playing netball for the Diamonds with that of sports journalist and commentator.

While the decision to leave her family in Bowen to come to Brisbane was difficult, and resulted in many teary phone calls home, Jemmason says now that "it was probably the best decision I've made".

"Coming from a small town community like Bowen up north, where you find a lot of people are small-minded, they don't really see much outside the town," she said.

"Coming from that to Brisbane and being offered all these different opportunities and even jobs, I want to show people that

even though you come from a very small town, you can still achieve heaps if you're willing to put in hard work."

Jemmason is one of the class of 2011 graduating Year 12 with the assistance of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, which provides scholarships for

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indigenous students to attend private boarding schools.

Of the 25 students leaving school this year, half have applied for university to study courses ranging from psychology and zoology to law, nursing, international relations and genetics.

The other half are headed for apprenticeships or further training and TAFE courses in construction, animal studies, travel and tourism, cabinet-making and diesel fitting. The foundation,

which has grown from supporting one student in 2008 to about 230 this year, is recording extraordinary success in helping indigenous students finish Year 12, and on to jobs or further education.

While about 47 per cent of indigenous students nationally finish Year 12, among AIEF students the rate is about 84 per cent, which is higher than the national average for all students of 73 per cent. The main goal is that all its students leave school for tertiary study or a job, and they provide support to students, from applying for university and jobs to finding somewhere to live and providing moral support and mentors.

The support Kiah Bobongie has received from the foundation has reaffirmed her intention to provide similar support to others. Originally from Mackay, Kiah, 17, moved to Toowoomba with her family to start high school at St Saviours College, which put her mother in touch with the AIEF.

When her family moved to Brisbane this year for work, Kiah elected to stay at school and boarded for her final year with the help of the AIEF. She is now

reunited with her family, applying to study arts at the University of Queensland next year. Kiah intends to major in indigenous studies and plans to build on her experience as a peer support mentor for young students at school, to make a career in helping people, particularly from the indigenous community. "I've always wanted to do it, but with the AIEF sponsorship it made me want to do it even more," she said.

Kiah has been offered a cadetship with the state Department of Communities, which will help her financially while she completes university, as well as giving her experience in her chosen field.

Both Kiah and Jemmason will be the first in their immediate families to attend university, and Jemmason's success has prompted her 20-year-old brother to consider applying for university. There's a bit of competition between the siblings, with the two comparing OP results. "I think I won," Jemmason says.

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