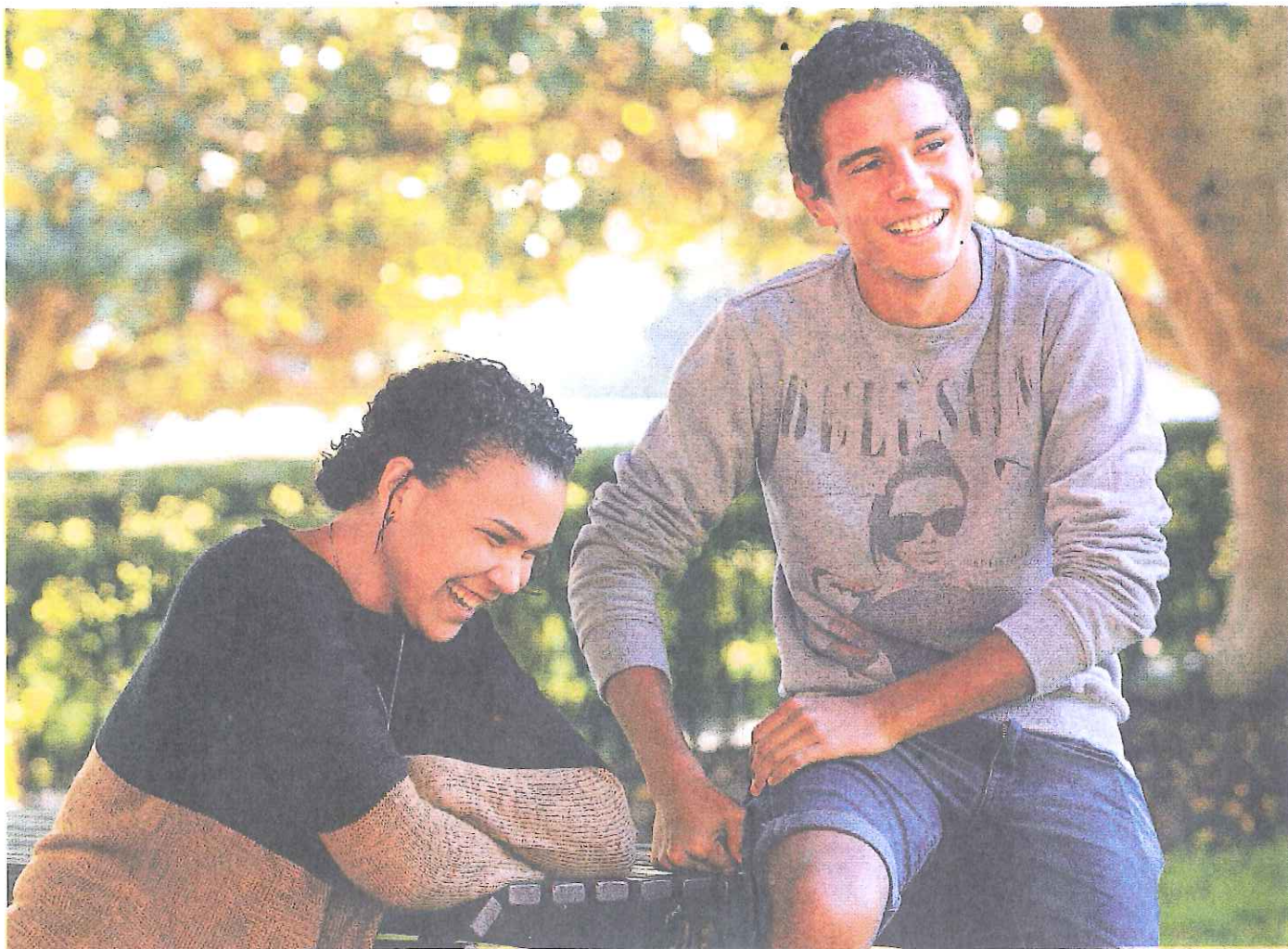


Libby's on course for success



JAMES CROUCHER

Libby Cook-Black and Mitch Heritage, at their Sydney campus yesterday, are indigenous students on scholarships at UNSW

NICOLA BERKOVIC

IT took Libby Cook-Black moving to Sydney to realise indigenous students could enrol in university and get a degree, as white kids did.

Now the 18-year-old is studying law at one of the nation's most prestigious law schools — the University of NSW — with the help of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation.

Ms Cook-Black, who was born on Thursday Island and raised by her mother in Cairns, is one of 23 indigenous students living at UNSW's Shalom College with a scholarship from the foundation.

"Back at home, my family do the best they can, but I come from a family where only one uncle has been to university, and he did it



**AUSTRALIAN
INDIGENOUS
EDUCATION
FOUNDATION**

when he was 35," she said. "I always thought, my mum is white so I expect her to go to university, but because I was indigenous there was never an expectation for me to go to uni — except from my mum.

"Then when I met other indigenous kids who were at university, passing and doing well and loving it, that's when it turned around and I thought I could be more than a netball player or a basketball player."

The AIEF was set up by former lawyer and investment banker Andrew Penfold, and provides op-

portunities for indigenous students around the nation to study at elite boarding schools.

In 2009, Mr Penfold convinced the government to invest \$20 million in his foundation, with a promise to match it with \$20m from the private sector over 20 years.

He reached his target last month, in just 2½ years.

Mr Penfold said it was always part of his plan to help indigenous students go to university. "If you look at why indigenous students don't succeed at university, in the vast majority of cases it's because they don't have sustainable living arrangements," he said.

Mr Penfold said he was convinced the best way to help indigenous students through university was to provide them with a

supportive environment and three healthy meals a day, so they could focus on their studies rather than on scraping together \$1 for a can of baked beans.

The foundation now provides scholarships for 23 indigenous students at Shalom College, and is working on expanding the scheme to other universities.

Ms Cook-Black first moved to Sydney to complete Years 11 and 12 at Pymble Ladies College, on the city's upper north shore, with an AIEF scholarship.

Another scholarship student, Mitch Heritage, who grew up in Ipswich, southeast Queensland, never imagined himself on staff at an investment bank in Sydney, but now he is working at Investec and studying commerce at UNSW.