

Business is on board, dollar for dollar



RENEE NOWYTARGER

Indigenous students, from left, Wazana Comollatti, Mindy Fisher and Shannon Prince at the AIEF launch aboard a P&O cruise liner in Sydney yesterday



**AUSTRALIAN
INDIGENOUS
EDUCATION
FOUNDATION**

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HAVING raised \$20 million in a couple of years from the private sector, despite the global financial crisis, the chief executive of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation says his organisation

is not just a good cause but also a good model for government funding of social programs.

Before the launch of the foundation's annual report yesterday, Andrew Penfold said the AIEF business model of matching public funding dollar for dollar with donations from corporate Australia gave governments more bang for their buck.

"It isn't just about funding, it's engaging the private sector in a program which links into employment opportunities," he said. "We're looking for ways to leverage the partnerships beyond the

financial investment, and ways to engage their people's expertise and capabilities."

After receiving \$20m from the federal government for scholarships to boarding school, Mr Penfold and his team — then based in his living room at home — convinced big business to match the government's contribution.

They also provide volunteers from their staff to mentor students one on one, tutor students, run workshops and even host boardroom lunches with the students and senior executives.

"It's like having 100 extra employees we don't have to pay for. It's connecting education and employment, and those two things have to go hand in hand," he said.

From providing one scholarship in 2009, this year the foundation is funding about 250 scholarships and is set to put 2000 indigenous students through boarding school over the next 20 years.

The next target, set by AIEF patron and former governor-general William Deane when launching the annual report, is to raise a further \$50m-\$100m from

the federal government, matched by the private sector, which would enable the foundation to educate 7000 students in the next 20 years.

One student who is benefiting from a scholarship is Miranda "Mindy" Fisher, 16, from Cherbourg in Queensland, who is in Year 11 at St Saviour's College in Toowoomba.

Mindy came to St Saviour's in Year 8 with three other girls from her home town.

She plans to become a social worker so she can return home and help her community in Cherbourg.