

# 6 10 Questions

Andrew Penfold, 46, CEO, indigenous education activist

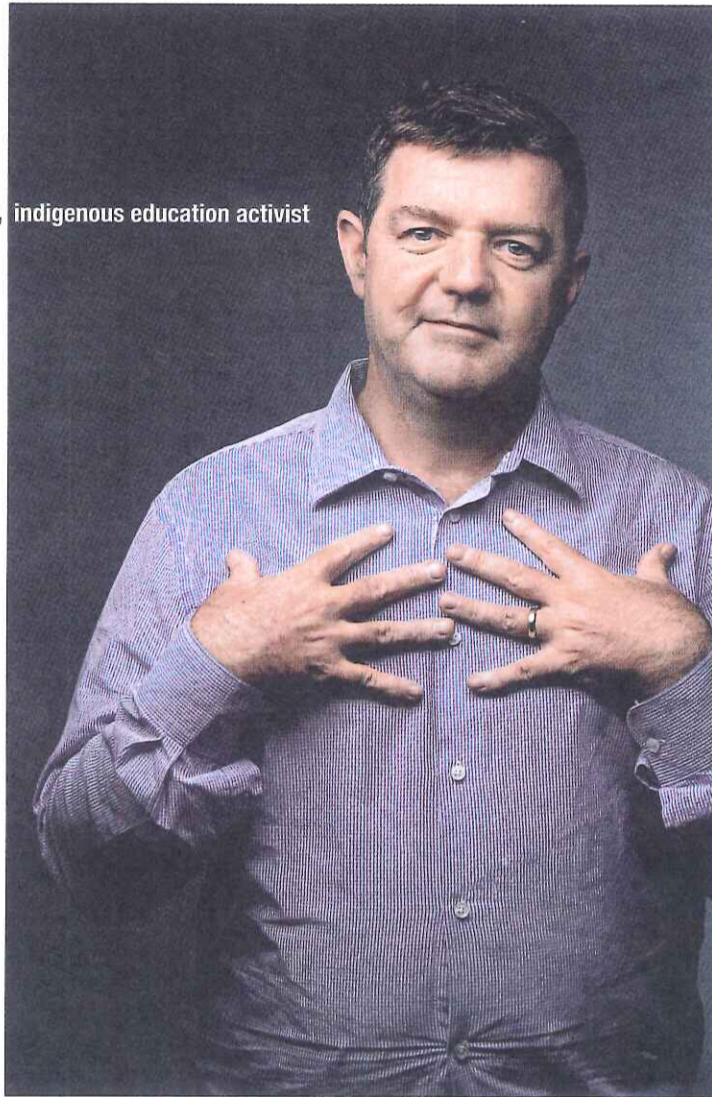
**You founded the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, which aims to put 2000 indigenous kids through top schools and universities within 20 years. Why?** It is universally accepted that education is the biggest barrier preventing indigenous equality in our country. Giving indigenous kids access to the best schools in the country is a no-brainer.

**You're not indigenous. What motivates you?** After my father died when I was six, Mum worked long hours, late nights and weekends. I was relatively disengaged from education in those crucial years of early secondary school. I spent my life knocking around the streets with kids from my inner Sydney suburb, Glebe, and Redfern. When I was 14, my mother and grandmother convinced St Joseph's College, Hunters Hill, to take me in as a boarder.

**How did you feel?** At the time it was the last thing I wanted – I felt like all my freedom was being taken away. I felt quite happy with my life as a rebellious teenager.

**How did Joey's change you?** I went from bottom of the class in Year 9 to topping the class in Year 12 in maths, history and economics. There was structure, boundaries, discipline, role models and good teachers. You were forced to do homework, had three healthy meals a day, went to bed early, there was a lot of mateship and the sport kept you active, engaged and tired. That holistic thing was exactly what I needed.

**You became a corporate lawyer and had a 20-year career, ending with a bank in Hong Kong. Why did you leave?** When I was in Hong Kong I played rugby on weekends. My 12 teammates were in Bali on a rugby tour and in the Sari Club when the bomb went off in 2002. They were all killed but I was with my family in Australia. Soon after, in Sydney, I heard Joey's had a program for indigenous kids. It was a defining moment in my life: I came back and spent the next five years working pro bono, full-time, on a program that would be financially self-sustaining. After that we set up AIEF to expand that work with schools around Australia.



**Who is "we"?** My wife Michelle and me. At the start we were running things from our dining room. We have been together since we met at a school dance when she was in Year 10 and I was in Year 11.

**Where did you find the money?** We raised funds through our networks, some big companies came on board and senior executives personally backed us. In 2009 the Federal Government gave us \$20 million, with 20 years to match it. But we met that target in two-and-a-half years.

**Why is the foundation successful?** Our results. Donors can see our organisation is bold, ambitious and determined to succeed. We have supported 416 students so far with the highest rate of retention and Year 12 completion in the country for indigenous kids – 90 per cent. Of those, 92 per cent go on to jobs or university.

**What now?** Our new target is another \$100 million, to fund 7000 kids by 2028 nationwide. We would love to work with the Federal Government and the private sector again on that. There is enormous demand from communities and parents for more scholarships.

**Opposition Leader Tony Abbott assured you of support after one of his staff recently threatened to withdraw funding. What's your take on that?** I don't want to dwell on this; the staffer apologised. Our focus is on indigenous education, not politics, and I think it's fair to say both sides of politics support AIEF's work.

JILL ROWBOTHAM

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