



RENEE NOWYTARGER

Andrew Penfold and wife Michelle have worked tirelessly to improve educational outcomes for indigenous children

Hard yards lead to recognition

RICK MORTON

SOCIAL AFFAIRS WRITER

ANDREW Penfold invoked the ideal of “costly grace” after he won the inaugural NSW Human Rights Award yesterday for his brick-by-brick approach to educating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The founder and chief executive of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation was announced the winner by NSW Premier Barry O’Farrell.

The award was established in memory of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, who saved Sydney businessman Ervin Forrester — and tens of thousands of others — from Nazi forces.

Mr Forrester attended the announcement, providing a poignant moment for Mr Penfold as he accepted the honour. “Listening to Mr Forrester; my wife’s grandfather is Hungarian and he and his wife and daughter came here as refugees in the 50s as well, and they’ve made a great contribution to this community,” Mr Penfold said, choking back tears.

Mr Penfold, 47, left a career in corporate law to found the Aus-

tralian Indigenous Education Foundation in 2007 with wife Michelle and has raised \$80 million to put 500 students through boarding school, into their final years of high school and on to university and work. The aim is to raise \$140m to support thousands more.

Mr Penfold referred to the words of German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his speech.

“His context was the problem of cheap faith, cheap grace, where there’s this notion that you can sort of do nothing, but if you go to church and say your prayers you’ll have everlasting grace in eternity,” he said. “He was challenging that and saying this is actually the core problem. We need to have costly grace; we don’t achieve outcomes unless we actually do something that is hard.”

Aboriginal leader Warren Mundine, who was also at the event, said the result was “just fantastic”. “The hurdles and challenges he has overcome to get the AIEF to where it is, but also . . . what it has achieved for those kids out there, you’ve got to put it down to the energy and the effort that Andrew has displayed and employed,” he said.