



NIKKI SHORT

Australian Indigenous Education Foundation scholarship students Tarryn Brown and Shannon Moloney at Kincoppal School in Sydney's Rose Bay

Field wide open as hometown bubbles burst

EXCLUSIVE

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IT was the size of the footy field at Shannon Moloney's new school that convinced him to leave his mother and his mates in Nowra on the NSW south coast and head to boarding school in Sydney.

But it was only when he walked into the classroom at Knox Grammar, a private boys school on Sydney's north shore, that Moloney realised education is about a lot more than maths.

"The first thing that comes to mind for every kid, I think, is that going to school is maths and science and that sucks," he said.

"School was a chore to me, I

didn't place much importance on it. I went for the sport and the mates."

A love of playing rugby union might have brought Moloney to Knox as a Year 8 student four years ago, but he now has a thirst for knowledge, a love of writing, and thinks education is one of the most important things in life.

Moloney, 17, is completing Year 12 this year with the support of a scholarship from the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, like his cousin, Tarryn Brown, 18, who is also on an AIEF scholarship across town at Kincoppal in the eastern suburbs.

The two hope it's the beginning of a family tradition. And it's a very large family; Moloney has 50 first cousins while Brown's grandparents are each one of 13 children and she counts about 200 first and second cousins.



Brown is following in the footsteps of her grandmother, Julie Moore, who completed Year 12 and went on to an arts/law degree, though Brown's plan is to study psychology.

Moloney and Brown are two of 65 students graduating Year 12 this year with the support of the AIEF, 25 of them the first in their families to finish school.

Of the 84 AIEF alumni to pass through the program to date, 93 per cent are studying at university, undertaking vocational training or in a job.

Key to the success of the AIEF is the level of support provided to

students, from extra tuition in school to external corporate mentors and one-on-one career counselling.

Brown has become so close to her mentor she's adopted her as another auntie and they're planning a road trip in the Northern Territory next year; Moloney says he has about nine parents now. "There's so many support staff and they make you excited to do things because they're excited. It's contagious," he says.

Both Brown and Moloney say the opportunity to attend school in Sydney has been life-changing.

Brown says she's always had ambition, with the example of her grandmother to guide her, but the AIEF scholarship has made the path easier.

"It's given me the opportunity to reach out and grab on to what I really want to do, as opposed to

try so hard and fail so many times before I got there. It's just that one step easier now," she says.

Before Knox and the AIEF, Moloney's plans only extended as far as finishing Year 12 and going into the army. Now he plans to study philosophy at university with the ambition of becoming an academic and author, and perhaps some journalism to tell people like his mates back home about a world of opportunities.

"I think education is one of the most important things people can do. You notice the discrepancies between Aboriginal and non-indigenous people and that's because people have no idea what there is out there," he says.

"You see my mates back home, they're all intelligent guys with a lot of potential, but they're stuck in the hometown bubble and don't know what's out there."