

BHP investing in 185 futures, and then some

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MINING giant BHP Billiton will today announce a \$10 million investment in indigenous education, a commitment that high school students Jasmin Barunga and Koree Walker-Ryan hope will enable more of their peers to leave their remote communities and join them at boarding school in Perth.

At a breakfast in Perth this morning, the president of BHP Billiton Iron Ore, Jimmy Wilson, will announce an extension of the company's three-year partnership with the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation that will more than double its investment in scholarships for West Australian indigenous students.

The AIEF provides scholarships to indigenous high school students around the nation to attend private boarding schools and also helps students after they leave school, supporting them to study at university or as they undertake an apprenticeship and further training or a job.

BHP has now committed \$16.3m to the AIEF, which will enable a minimum of 185 scholarships over the next 10 years for 120 high school students and 65 university students.

The AIEF will contribute about \$4m over that time through federal government funding.

Mr Wilson said the partnership demonstrated BHP's commitment to supporting educational and development opportunities for indigenous people.

"Not only does the scholarship recipient benefit, they also become role models to other young people in their communities, who can then follow in their footsteps," he said. "This ripple effect is very powerful and something that we're incredibly proud to be associated with."

AIEF chief executive Andrew Penfold said BHP's investment



MARIE NIRME

BHP Billiton Iron Ore president Jimmy Wilson with Koree Walker-Ryan, left, and Jasmin Barunga in Perth yesterday



was not just financial: it also participated in the mentor program run by the AIEF that partners students with adult mentors in the company.

"In a few weeks, Koree will join the 90 per cent of AIEF scholarship students who have success-

fully completed Year 12," he said. "And like 93 per cent of these Year 12 graduates, he is set to move straight from boarding school into further study or employment for a meaningful career."

Koree, 17, from Newman near Port Hedland, is in his last year at Aquinas College in Perth and will become the second in his family, after his uncle, to finish school.

He has applied for an apprenticeship next year with BHP to become a heavy-diesel mechanic in the mining industry.

"I don't like seeing a lot of indigenous families who don't have an education and I'd like to see more students like me going to school down here in Perth," he said. "A lot of kids living in communities are not going to school and I reckon it would be good if they got a scholarship to take them away from all the bad stuff that happens there."

When Jasmin, 14, first arrived at PLC as a Year 8 student last year from a small community near Derby, in the Kimberley, she

faced a lot of work to catch up with the other students, particularly in English.

Now she and the other indigenous girls at the school are teaching Year 4 students about their culture and language and introducing them to traditional foods and customs.

"One of them asked if we lived in huts, which was pretty funny, and they also asked what we used as a ball," Jasmin said.

"They thought we wrapped grass and twigs and stuff."