

A scholarship can change a life

The not-for-profit sector is vital in beating disadvantage

MIRANDA Fisher's post-school life is off to a flying start. If she wasn't going to university to study social work, the Year 12 graduate from St Saviour's College, Toowoomba, could build a career in journalism, judging by her front-page story on Saturday. She has seen the devastation caused by substance abuse in her home town of Cherbourg, 250km northwest of Brisbane, where she will return one day to help her community.

She completed high school with a scholarship from the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation and is one of more than 400 students supported by the foundation since 2008. More than 90 per cent of secondary school students on AIEF scholarships complete Year 12, and nearly 100 per cent of the foundation's graduates make a successful transition to further study or employment.

Such success, like that of Andrew Forrest's Australian Employment Covenant in boosting indigenous employment, highlights the contribution of the not-for-profit sector in improving opportunities for disadvantaged Australians. Well-targeted and efficiently run, such programs are making a difference while many government schemes fail to achieve the necessary breakthroughs, despite costing much more.

Miranda's story showed the importance of philanthropy, of challenging young people to help themselves and giving them a chance. As she wrote, so many of her people "talk themselves down and don't have many people to support them... they have dreams, but they don't know how to pursue them, or they don't have people to support them, and they can't see the bigger life outside of home".