

## Bowraville blues form Carlie's law

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AS a young girl in Bowraville, Carlie Smart watched her fellow Aboriginal friends, relatives and community members get carted off to jail and stung by the system.

Later, she learned more about the disproportionate rates of incarceration compared with other Australians and decided she would try to learn more — never realising it would spark a series of events that would lead to her becoming the first indigenous law student from the area.

But for the 23-year-old on an Australian Indigenous Education Foundation tertiary scholarship, the road out of the NSW mid north coast hinterland township has been difficult and, at times, almost unbearable. "My parents didn't finish high school and they wanted that for us. I knew that I was going to get an education, but I didn't know how," she said.

"Growing up, you always heard stories about people being picked on by the police or going to jail when they shouldn't have and I just thought, no, I don't want it to be like that."

She boarded at St Vincent's



College, Potts Point, in Sydney's eastern suburbs on a scholarship pre-dating the AIEF before starting her law degree at the University of NSW. "That first year was so hard, I was homesick and struggling to afford to live. I couldn't get a job because everything required prior experience," she said.

Her grandmother Ann Edwards phoned AIEF chief executive Andrew Penfold and asked whether he could help. Ms Smart only wanted a job, so he found her one. "I honestly believe I wouldn't be here about to finish my law degree if it wasn't for that moment."

In her fifth year and due to finish, Ms Smart isn't sure what form of law she will practise, but acknowledges that, growing up, she only ever knew about one kind of law: criminal.

Although she has not worked on the case, Ms Smart has a part-time job at Allens, the firm acting pro bono for the families of three children murdered in Bowraville more than 20 years' ago.



RENEE NOWYTARGER

Carlie Smart in Sydney this week. 'I just thought, no, I don't want it to be like that'