

Opening education door to disadvantaged

ANNIE NAVIN

ANDREW Penfold believes that for the nation's most disadvantaged kids, the door to quality education has been closed for too long.

That is why he founded the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, an organisation that provides scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids to study at elite private schools across the country.

No stranger to disadvantage, Mr Penfold received a scholarship to one of Sydney's top all-boys boarding schools only after his mother begged the school to take him in.

"I was relatively disengaged from education in those crucial years of early secondary school. I spent my life knocking around the streets with kids from my inner-Sydney suburb, Glebe, and Redfern," he said.

Mr Penfold went on to excel as a lawyer and financier. Losing 12

friends in the 2002 Bali bombings inspired him to raise up to \$2 million for the families of Australian and Indonesian victims. He then quit his high-flying job, and spent two years working from home to set up the AIEF.

The foundation says it has the highest Year 12 completion rate of any such program in the country, earning support from the public and private sector.

Several students have been supported to go on to university.

Jayde Hagan, a high-scoring mathematics and physics student, recently started a bachelor degree in civil/mining engineering thanks to a partnership between the AIEF and BHP Billiton.

She is one of thousands of students who have received funding from the AIEF. One day, Mr Penfold hopes, one of these students will be Australia's first indigenous prime minister.

The deadline for nominating *The Australian's* Australian of the Year closes tomorrow.