

The sky's the limit for Riarna Milgate, who's studying at one of Sydney's best schools.

CHANCE OF A *lifetime*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW GOLDIE
STYLING BY JAMELA DUNCAN

Will Australia ever have an indigenous female Prime Minister? The founder of a bold new education initiative thinks so. **Michael Sheather** reports.

Riarna Milgate, 12 YEAR 8, LORETO NORMANHURST, SYDNEY

Riarna Milgate's family lives in Coonabarabran, in western NSW. It's about 450 kilometres and a whole world away from Loreto Normanhurst, the exclusive girls boarding school in Sydney which Riarna attends.

Bright and ambitious, Riarna is one of more than 400 Aboriginal students who will this year move to the big smoke on a scholarship to some of the nation's blue-ribbon private schools.


She is part of a program administered by The Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF), an organisation whose founder, Andrew Penfold, became a Member of the Order of Australia this year for his work.

In the past five years, the AIEF has produced 151 high school graduates, 93 per cent of whom are now either at university or in the workforce.

As a young Kamilaroi woman, Riarna says she was encouraged by her mother to take the scholarship and move away from home.

"I am the first person in my immediate family to go away to school and that's important," says Riarna, who hopes to play netball for the NSW Swifts one day. "I really like the atmosphere at Loreto and I would like to work with girls and sports, maybe as a teacher. That would be wonderful."

HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY NISHA VAN BERKEL, RIARNA WEARS TED BAKER TOP. THESE IMAGES HAVE BEEN RETOUCHEE.



Jasmin Barunga, 14
YEAR 10, PRESBYTERIAN LADIES' COLLEGE, PERTH

Jasmin Barunga's life has changed irrevocably since she began attending the Presbyterian Ladies' College, Perth, two years ago. "When I first came here, it was really hard," she says. "My marks were low and I had a hard time keeping up with everyone else. But once I got used to it, I started getting higher marks in my tests and essays."

Out of school term, Jasmin, who is a member of the Worrora Saltwater people, lives in Port Hedland with her family, but was born in Mowanjum, a remote Aboriginal community not far from Derby in Western Australia.

"My life there was mainly hunting and fishing, and going out into the bush, a very traditional kind of life," she says. "But we would catch the bus into town every day for school."

Jasmin's mother encouraged her to apply for an AIEF scholarship after she visited Perth and saw some of the big schools there, and what they had to offer. "My mum wanted a better education and a future for me, and I want it, too," says Jasmin.

"I can't decide whether I want a career in hair and beauty or to become a nurse. But it's great to have a choice."

THIS PAGE: HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY TAMZIN MULDER. JASMIN WEARS TED BAKER DRESS. OPPOSITE: HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY JANE HETA. DAIJAH WEARS MIX AT COLES T-SHIRT AND CUFF BY LOUISA.



Daijah Martens, 16
YEAR 12, ST PETERS LUTHERAN COLLEGE, BRISBANE

Daijah Martens' grandmother, a Gunggandji woman, was a member of the Stolen Generations, during the 1960s, when she was taken from the remote community of Yarrabah in Queensland to Cairns. Her other grandmother lived in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and came to Australia in the '50s in search of a better life.

"When I think about what my grandmothers have been through and all the hardships they endured, and I look at the opportunities that are available to me, I am so grateful," says Daijah.

Born in Cairns, Daijah came to St Peters in 2011, after she applied for an AIEF scholarship. "Cairns is a wonderful place and I love going home, but I needed exposure to other experiences," she says.

Those new experiences included her introduction to psychology as a subject in Year 10 and now Daijah plans to take it up at university. "It's fascinating to understand how we interact with each other and the effect our subconscious has on our actions, but I would never have found that without my scholarship."



Marclene Mooka, 18
THE CATHEDRAL SCHOOL & JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY, TOWNSVILLE

Marclene Mooka comes from Dauan Island, a small granite island at the tip of Cape York Peninsula, in the Torres Strait. Only 150 people live there and the local school stops at Year 7.

“Coming to school in Townsville was a massive change for me,” says Marclene, who gained an AIEF scholarship to The Cathedral School in 2010 and who says she saw Townsville as “a huge city”.

“I was used to fishing and swimming, and knowing everyone’s name. It was so different and a much faster way of life. It took a lot of getting used to, but the opportunities were incredible,” she says.

During Year 12, she completed the Learn Earn Legend! program, giving students exposure to work in Canberra. “I got to see how important it is to contribute,” she says. “And it gave me a path to follow.”

Marclene is now in her second year of a nursing degree. “There are a lot of health issues up on the islands in the Torres Strait and I figured that, in doing nursing, I can give something back to my community.”

THIS PAGE: HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY MEGAN CALVERT. MARCLENE WEARS TOP AND NECKLACE BY TS14+. OPPOSITE: HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY BONNIE GILLIES



Jenna Owen, 26
UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, SYDNEY

When Jenna Owen was 16, she applied for her driver’s licence – but failed her eye test. The examiner said she needed to see an optometrist. “I went along and struck up a friendship with my local optometrist, did my work experience there and loved the job,” says Jenna, now the first indigenous optometrist in NSW and only the second in Australia.

Jenna, who comes from a tiny hamlet called Albert, about 150 kilometres west of Dubbo in NSW, completed a combined Bachelor of Optometry/Bachelor of Science degree at the University of NSW, in 2010. “Mine was the first intake of students to a degree that therapeutically endorsed optometrists to prescribe medicines for the eyes,” she says.

While she studied, Jenna lived at Shalom College, where she became the second graduate supported by an AIEF Shalom Gamarada Scholarship. Now, she is running her own business in Newcastle.

“My only hope when I graduated from university was that somebody would see what I had done and say, ‘I can do that, too’,” says Jenna.

“What I hope is that someone will back themselves to get an education that otherwise they wouldn’t have.”

*** For more information on AIEF programs or to donate, visit aief.com.au.**