



Dick Smith, left, made Andrew Penfold's day when he tipped \$1 million into the AIEF fund to educate Aboriginal children

RENEE NOWYTARGER

Smith delivers \$1m lesson in tackling disadvantage

 **AIEF**
AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS
EDUCATION FOUNDATION

EXCLUSIVE

GINA RUSHTON

DICK Smith was browsing through *The Australian* when he read an editorial detailing the success of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation in transforming the futures of its scholarship recipients.

"I've always tried to assist Aboriginal people but basically everything I've done I've failed at ... we are a very wealthy country but that hasn't been properly shared with Aboriginal Australians," said the 70-year-old philanthropist and businessman.

Mr Smith contacted the foundation's chief executive, Andrew Penfold, and told him he would

send through a few dollars. "The next morning we realised that \$1 million had landed in our account and I nearly fell off my chair. I had to go check with our accountant that I hadn't misread the number of zeroes," Mr Penfold said.

Mr Smith said his eyes were opened to indigenous disadvantage when he passed through various settlements during a recent road trip from Steep Point to Byron Bay. "There is a staggering amount of money, billions of dollars poured into Aboriginal communities and I think so much must be wasted because no one can say Aboriginal people have benefited in the last 200 years like white people have," he said.

As a "ruthless businessman" and advocate for effective altruism, Mr Smith said he was attracted to the fact the AIEF spent just 2.4 per cent of its scholarship funds — raised through private investment and government funding — on running costs.

"I often wonder how much of

my donations are actually going to the cause but I know this is going to be money well spent because it'll help educate about 15 kids and if just one of those could become a leader that is important," he said.

He called on other wealthy Australians to fulfil their "obligation" as philanthropists and invest in the education of indigenous Australians.

"I am a fan of the late Dame Elisabeth Murdoch who said that with wealth comes responsibility," he said.

Mr Smith suggested getting his acquaintance, billionaire Gina Rinehart, on board.

"Would you like her to put some money into this?" he asked Mr Penfold. "Righto, well I'll give her a ring and ask her."

Mr Penfold said the AIEF had the highest retention and Year 12 completion rate of any federally funded program in the country.

The foundation is aiming to raise \$140m to help educate 7000 kids and has so far raised \$90m.