

Scholarships open clearer path through life



MITCHELL NADIN

STUDYING at one of Australia's elite universities is a prospect that Zieha Flick and James Widders-Leece would have thought impossible not long ago.

The 17-year-olds, both from regional NSW, said they had "limited opportunities" in life until they were offered places in the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation.

Since then, the scholarship program has helped James complete his schooling at Sydney's prestigious Knox Grammar, while Zieha studied at St Vincent's, Potts Point.

Without the program, Zieha said she could see little opportunity of leaving her home town in northwest NSW.

"I was only in primary school when but I could see the older kids there and what my future would be like if I stayed in Walgett," she said. "If I was not on this scholarship I probably wouldn't even be going to school."

The pair are among 70 participants in the program expected to complete Year 12 this year.

A ceremony for students from NSW, Victoria and Western Australia will be held tomorrow at Sydney's Woolloomooloo Bay Hotel. The remaining students from Queensland will celebrate later in the year, after they complete their exams in November.

Since the program was launched in 2007, about 230 students have graduated from Year 12, and there are currently 500 scholarships nationwide.

A foundation spokeswoman said the program had raised



Zieha Flick and James Widders-Leece have opportunities they never imagined

RENEE NOWYTARGER

almost \$90 million and aimed to raise \$140m to help educate 7000 indigenous students and support their move into meaningful careers. AFL stars Adam Goodes and Michael O'Loughlin have recently joined the program to raise its profile.

James, from the northern NSW city of Armidale, said he had expected to go into a trade until the scholarship came along, but he had refocused his ambition on becoming a professional athlete.

"The town that I was in wasn't accommodating to that aspiration

so I decided to move to a school with better equipment and an emphasis on life skills," he said.

"I was edging towards just getting a trade and going into construction and not really pursuing something I wanted to do."

And although Zieha is a tal-

ented dancer who has performed in Hawaii and Los Angeles with the St Vincent's dance group, she says she wants to move into teaching young children.

"I'd like to come here to Sydney University and do an early childhood course," she said.