

Tristan leads the way, carrying family's dreams



LYNDON MECHIESEN

St Joseph's Nudgee College student Tristan Elu, left, with younger brother Paddy Hobson, is the first person from his Cape York family to graduate from high school

GINA RUSHTON

TRISTAN Elu became the first person in his family to finish high school when he graduated as a boarder from St Joseph's Nudgee College in Brisbane.

The Australian Indigenous Education Foundation will honour Tristan tomorrow among its 46 Queensland scholarship students who are completing Year 12 across the state. "I'm the first. Mum and Dad and Grandma and

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Grandpa are pretty happy about it," Tristan says.

At first, the move to populous Brisbane was a confronting change from the calm of Tristan's close-knit community on the Lockhart River in Cape York.

"When I came in Year 8 the

number of boys at the school was half the size of the community I come from back home," he remembers. "I had no friends and no family. I was so homesick ... it was pretty hard for me."

Tristan says he was wary of his dormitory room packed with sleeping strangers, but after just a few weeks things turned around.

"At the end of the day, they became my best mates."

Tristan found a new interest in learning and says his favourite subject has been marine studies,

where he was given the chance to go scuba diving off Moreton Island. "When I came to Nudgee, my grades were pretty low, I was getting Cs and Ds. But I got support from teachers and supervisors and it made life easier."

Tristan's younger brother, Paddy Hobson, started at the college last year on an AIEF scholarship. "He decided to come because I was here and I told him it would help him with literacy and numeracy," Tristan says. "Hopefully, he will follow his dreams now."

Paddy says having his brother around made the transition easier and he is now "friends with half the school".

"Tristan came home and told us how good it was, and that he had made lots of friends, and he told me I could learn more and get a second chance," Paddy says.

"It's very different back home because there are black kids ... and here there are cars cruising around 24/7, but it's pretty fun."

The foundation's chief executive, Andrew Penfold, says more

than a third of the graduating class comes from remote or very remote communities.

"And 15 of the 70 students will be the first person in their family to finish Year 12," Mr Penfold says.

"Like Tristan, many of them have inspired their younger siblings, cousins and friends back home to pursue their education."

Tristan's plan is to begin a diesel-fitting apprenticeship and eventually get a job in mining.

But, first, he'll go fishing and hunting with his family.