

# Tyrone's second home is where hope lives



GINA RUSHTON

It's a hell of a "long trek" from Nambucca Heads, on the NSW mid north coast, to Campbelltown, in Sydney's west, but for indigenous 16-year-old Tyrone Kay, each of those 500-odd kilometres between home and school is one step closer to a bright future.

Tyrone has been a boarder at St Gregory's College since 2011, when he took on an Australian Indigenous Education Foundation scholarship, and he's now working with the foundation to map out a post-school pathway.

"I want to get a trade with the defence force, maybe carpentry," he said. "I probably won't get a job out at (Nambucca Heads) and, thinking of the history of my family, they usually end up without a job."

He admits the loneliness of being so far from home has been difficult, and a survey to be launched next week in Sydney by Tony Abbott notes that tackling homesickness and keeping indigenous boarders connected with their communities is key to getting kids to the end of Year 12.

The report was compiled by the AIEF to help schools establishing their own Aboriginal student boarding programs.

The foundation has achieved a 92 per cent Year 12 completion rate and offers more than 500 scholarships annually nationwide. The national Year 12 retention rate is 25 per cent.

The compendium was written based on interviews with 160 educators as well as indigenous leaders such as Marcia Langton.



BRITTA CAMPION

Headmaster Matt Brennan with AIEF scholarship students, from left, at back, Harrison Wighton, Jacob Sykes, Brandon Donnelly and Tim Wight, and at front, from left, Riley Sheehan, Tyrone Kay and Lindsay Munro

At St Greg's, deputy headmaster Matt Brennan said Tyrone's blossoming into an "engaging young man" was an illustration of the value the foundation was able to bring.

"He was quite meek and shy when he came here and had difficulty making eye contact," Mr Brennan said.

Mr Brennan was one of the contributors to the compendium

and has seen first-hand how important it is to bolster connections between indigenous boarders and their communities and families.

"Whether it's just making a phone call home to tell them how well he's doing; those calls are more important than when a boy misbehaves," he said.

"We are looking at around 12 to 18 per cent of our boarders being indigenous and we are very

happy with our retention rates. If we have seven Year 12 boys that are indigenous, we would be very disappointed if all seven didn't get through to further study or work."

The 50 schools consulted in the report each had their unique way of supporting indigenous boarders, according to AIEF projects director Renee Coffey, including "having Welcome to

Country at assemblies or having a designated space for indigenous students or cultural awareness training for teachers".

Other schools work hard to make sure those boarding from remote communities don't feel different or "special". "One school has a 'boys among boys' policy and that works," she said.

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