

Hard to say goodbye but world was waiting for Jakheen

 **AIEF**
AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS
EDUCATION FOUNDATION

ANDREW BURRELL

Aboriginal teenager Jakheen Cooby was deeply reluctant to leave his family and friends in Broome to attend an elite boarding school in Perth.

But his mother knew there was trouble on the streets for boys like him and few job prospects if he stayed at home. "She told me there would be better opportunities down here, rather than up in Broome, and that it would get me away from all the bad stuff," Jakheen said of his move to Perth when he was 13. "Especially (because) of all the groups which are stuffing about up there."

Now 16, Jakheen is preparing to enter Year 12 at Scotch College and has ambitions to attend university. He has enjoyed studying history — "especially when we did JFK" — and has noticed improvements in his performance in English and other subjects.

The talented basketballer and footballer is attending Scotch thanks to the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, which provides scholarships that enable indigenous students to enrol at

some of the nation's best schools. "It's been a really good experience," he said.

Jakheen's scholarship is being sponsored by the AIEF and mining giant BHP Billiton, which has also assigned him a mentor to provide career advice and general support.

Under the program, mentors and students meet regularly and gather with other pairs at least twice a year for activities hosted by the AIEF. It aims to create long-term relationships that will support students through school and afterwards.

Jakheen's mentor, BHP government relations manager Rob Carruthers, said he had enjoyed striking up a friendship with the teenager. "I think Jakheen can ask me for advice on anything," he said. "I've been lucky — he's a fine upstanding young man and he takes it all in his stride. Nothing seems to faze him."

AIEF executive director Andrew Penfold said BHP's involvement was critical.

"We love working with companies like BHP Billiton who put their money where their mouth is and invest in building the capacity of the communities in which they operate," he said.

Although he is unsure what he wants to do after school, it seems unlikely Jakheen will be moving home. "My mum wants me to stay here," he said.



Jakheen Cooby, 16, with mentor Rob Carruthers of BHP Billiton, at Scotch College in Perth

COLIN MURTY