

Jerone finds a strong foundation for success



LYNDON MECHIESEN

Jerone Wills outside HSBC offices in Brisbane yesterday



MARK SCHLIEBS

Five years after leaving his Northern Territory home for Brisbane as a 15-year-old, Jerone Wills feels like he is living a dream.

From the 11th floor of HSBC's Brisbane office, the law student from Palmerston yesterday told how he once thought he'd end up learning a trade or working a low-level government job in Darwin.

Now even the local chief executive of the bank hopes Mr Wills, a 20-year-old beneficiary of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation, will consider a career in international finance.

"If you were to ask me what I wanted to do five years ago, before I left, I probably would have said I'll pick up a trade or work in the government," Mr Wills said on the final day of his second paid summer internship with HSBC. "I kind of thought that was the only thing for me, in terms of work.

"But moving down here and being linked up with AIEF and being provided opportunities like this ... it's really kind of opened my eyes. It's a bit surreal and a bit overwhelming, because I just

wouldn't have thought that a company like HSBC, one of the biggest banks in the world, that I would ever work there."

Mr Wills first came across the AIEF when he was a rugby-mad 14-year-old curious about the prestigious St Joseph's Nudgee College in Brisbane's north and its sports program. He became one of the 900 people to be awarded a scholarship from the foundation, giving him the opportunity to board at the school from Year 10 onwards.

He finished school with high marks and enrolled at Queensland University of Technology in 2015 — again with assistance with the AIEF, which then encouraged him to apply for an internship with HSBC.

HSBC's Australian chief executive Tony Cripps said he hoped Mr Wills would end up in finance. "Jerone is a terrific kid," Mr Cripps said yesterday.

"It just continues to underscore how amazing the opportunities of a good education can completely change the potential for somebody to break down all the barriers and to come from a remote community and end up as a highly successful profession."

AIEF executive director Andrew Penfold said the help of companies such as HSBC, which alone has contributed more than \$35 million to the foundation since 2011, allowed more students to receive scholarships.