

Investment helps Aboriginal students believe in themselves



AMOS AIKMAN
NORTHERN CORRESPONDENT

It's a long way from the mean streets of Kempsey in northern NSW to the plush offices of a Sydney law firm, but Kygim King seems to have made it with style.

The 23-year-old, one of the first recipients of an Australian Indigenous Education Foundation scholarship, in 2009, went on to finish Year 12, graduate from university and be admitted as a solicitor. "I was very overwhelmed, very excited," Ms King says.

"I think it was a really proud moment for my family and me. I'm the only one in my family to have completed university."

Ms King is on secondment to a big-four bank before starting a graduate program at a top-tier law firm later this year, and has some advice for others hoping to follow her.

"I would say take every opportunity that comes up, build your knowledge and experience. And just believe in yourself, because you are good enough," she says.

Ms King's mother, Beryl Hoskins, is "very, very proud of where she is now". "I want her to go all the way," Ms Hoskins says. "Where she wants to stop is up to her."

Ms King recalls the shock of moving from a small town.

Ms Hoskins says it took "a lot of TLC to get her through it". "You've got to understand where they're coming from, what they're feeling, and give them a little bit of hope," Ms Hoskins says. "They will take off like a skyrocket then."

The AIEF reported a 94 per cent retention and Year 12 completion rate last year. The number of students it supports has grown from one in 2008 to more than 500 last year.

Executive director Andrew Penfold said growth had produced its own challenges. "The scale of the demand is far greater than our existing funds can meet," he said.

The AEIF will now be boosted

Recognition comes via \$138m fillip to raising aspirations

The federal government has unveiled a \$138 million package to support indigenous education as part of commemorations marking the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum.

The funding, allocated to 15 organisations, is aimed at boosting the number of indigenous people employed in the growing technology sector, raising aspirations for tertiary studies, and supporting students with mentoring, scholarships and boarding opportunities.

The '67 referendum removed barriers to counting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the census and to the commonwealth passing "special" laws for them. It was also the time many indigenous Australians came to feel more part of the country, when a public goodwill campaign

alerted people to their rights and fostered confidence to use them.

Campaigner Theresa French said that before the vote "because of the hardships most young Aboriginals have had, I think that the most important thing would be education".

One of her children went on to become a teacher. Ms French told *The Australian* recently that indigenous people could now have the equality they sought if they reached out and took it but they still faced discrimination.

The commemorative funding package is intended to "honour the spirit and determination of those who campaigned for the successful 1967 referendum" and increase social and economic inclusion.

Announcing the funding this week, Malcolm Turnbull said: "For full inclusion in the economic and social life of the nation, we need our young indigenous people to have a solid education while keeping their identity strong."

AMOS AIKMAN



CHRIS PAVLICH

'Take every opportunity that comes': Kygim King

by a commonwealth investment of \$30 million to support up to 500 students a year to 2020.

"This latest investment by the Australian government (part of \$138m) to support indigenous education) comes at a vital time and is already committed to continuing our existing program.

"Our challenge now is to ensure we continue to match gov-

ernment funding as we have in the past by leveraging the private sector to enable us to grow our program and meet future demand."

AIEF takes students from all over Australia, with about 38 per cent coming from remote or very remote areas. It has supported almost 400 secondary school graduates and more than 30 university graduates.