

Student to follow nan's inspiring work



MARK SCHLIEBS

Danella Mene has spent most of the past five years at a Brisbane boarding school thousands of kilometres from her home in the Torres Strait, but it is the work of her grandmother at Moa Island that is now driving her.

The 17-year-old is set to finish Year 12 at Brisbane's Clayfield College next month thanks to a scholarship from the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation that she hopes will help her become a nurse.

At a special ceremony for 57 AIEF scholarship recipients at Queensland's Parliament House earlier this month, Danella said her family wanted her to build a successful career and she was inspired by her grandmother's work as healthcare worker on Moa Island.

"I thought about my family, especially my Nan, how she's working in the healthcare industry," Danella said. "She's back at the community at Moa Island. She's been working there, I think, for over 40 years.

"It was very difficult for her. She didn't go to university — I'm actually the first girl out of my family to go to university — she never really had the chance to continue her education (when she was younger) because she had to take care for other family members.

"She started late, and she still does study to get higher qualifications."

Another scholarship student who will soon sit his final exams — Melakai Williams from Mossman in far north Queensland — said he hoped to be a role model for his two younger brothers and



JOSH KELLY

Danella Mene and Melekai Williams at Parliament House in Brisbane

little sister by becoming a PE teacher. They are among nearly 100 AIEF scholarship recipients finishing Year 12 this year.

But several months after the Queensland government said it would not provide funding to the organisation, AIEF boss Andrew Penfold said more help was needed to continue providing its 500 scholarships.

"We need renewed investment to continue the program at this scale," Mr Penfold said.

"More funding will secure places for children who want to get a great education and build a brighter future for themselves, their families, communities and the nation.

"This year AIEF will fund over 500 scholarships around the country and over 90 students in the program are completing Year 12.

"Our scholars continue to achieve outcomes that set the benchmark for indigenous education programs, including 94 per cent retention and Year 12 completion — so AIEF, a small program in the scheme of things, is making a big difference."