

### THE GAP STOPS HERE

*So why must a  
successful program  
beg for cash?*

**ANDREW  
PENFOLD**



This year marks a decade since the Council of Australian Governments committed to the Closing the Gap strategy, setting targets to reduce or eliminate inequality in health, education and employment outcomes.

This year also marks 10 years since the Australian government started a partnership with the private sector through the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation to meet the huge demand from indigenous families for secondary school scholarships at leading boarding schools.

If you can't measure something, you can't manage it, so from the start AIEF set ambitious targets: 90 per cent of the students awarded AIEF scholarships would stay at school and complete Year 12, and more than 90 per cent of those graduates would pursue productive careers after finishing Year 12, whether that be through further study, training or direct employment.

In our 10th year, I'm proud to say we've exceeded these 90 per cent success rate targets every year, with the result that 1000 additional indigenous young people are now successfully taking their place in the world with confidence and pride, earning good money, buying houses, starting families and productively contributing to their communities and the nation.

In having the power that quality education gives them to take charge of their destiny, these young people are closing the gap.

When they finish Year 12 and become doctors, lawyers, police officers, artists, engineers, bankers, scientists, mechanics, builders and businesspeople they make an even greater contribution as they provide proof to the next generation that anything is possible.

Libby Cook-Black from Cairns is one of them. Since completing Year 12 on an AIEF scholarship in 2011, she has been studying law while pursuing an elite sporting career, which has seen her represent Australia in rugby league and rugby sevens. For Libby, having her AIEF scholarship and going to Pymble Ladies College lifted her educational aspirations.

"I fell in love with learning and realised I wanted more of the knowledge and more of the power that education could give me," she said.

The success of the AIEF program is highlighted by the fact Year 12 attainment is the only Closing the Gap target on track. Since 2008, it has risen from 45.4 per cent to 61.5 per cent, against a comparable non-indigenous rate of 86.4 per cent.

But even for Year 12 attainment, progress has been agonisingly slow. There are about 10,000 additional indigenous kids who need to finish Year 12 to meet the target. With all the power of the national, state and territory governments we should have closed this gap already, yet hundreds of millions are spent each year on programs that are failing, while non-government programs with proven outcomes have no sustainable or certain funding to grow.

Our track record of battling with blood, sweat and tears to consistently achieve success rates over 90 per cent and match every dollar of government funding from the private sector to make it half-price ought to be enough to earn AIEF a sustainable future. AIEF can continue to operate into the next 10 years if the government continues to fund \$15 million a year, which gets matched by the private sector.

With more sustainable funding, we can continue to respond to the unrelenting community demand for scholarships and access to the kind of quality education that allow young indigenous Australians such as Libby to change the nation.

*Andrew Penfold is founder and executive director of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation. [www.aief.com.au](http://www.aief.com.au)*