

Big sister achieves her dream



SAM BUCKINGHAM-JONES

At 14, Nikita Crawshaw-Kearney was in Year 9 and uninterested in her classes — if she went to school, that is. The Gurindji and Wiradjuri girl, who lived in Darwin, had dreamt of university but saw no way to reach it. She attended only half her classes and her friends had no similar goals. Just as passion can be contagious, so too can indifference.

“University wasn’t a thing in the group,” the 17-year-old said. “I thought I could do better.”

This year, Nikita started studying for a bachelor of social work with criminology and criminal justice at the University of NSW — a double degree whose graduates are described as “professionally qualified to create change”.

Nikita last year finished at St Catherine’s School in Waverley, in Sydney’s east, after applying for a scholarship with the Australian Indigenous Education Fund to put her through Years 10, 11 and 12.

“It was very scary. I was so



JAMES CROUCHER

Nikita Crawshaw-Kearney, right, with her sister, Jada, 13

scared, but it was really good,” she said. “It was nothing like my school back home; everything was completely different.”

Her grandmother and mother inspired her and she inspired others: her 13-year-old sister, Jada, started at St Catherine’s last year, and their younger sister plans to apply too. “When I was in primary school, I watched my sister get on the plane,” Jada said.

“And as I was leading up to high school, she would tell me to come to boarding school. The opportunities that opened up to her inspired me to go.” She now plays AFL, basketball, netball and competes in athletics.

Nikita wanted to do business

and marketing, but a visit to Cape York in Year 10 changed that.

“We worked in schools and remote Aboriginal communities and spoke to elders,” she said. “I felt I was connecting with the kids, and felt like a role model for them. I want to work with Aboriginal youth. That’s where my heart is.”

The AIEF’s 2017 annual report, released today, shows 109 scholarship graduates from schools and universities last year. The organisation has raised \$164 million since 2008 and has put hundreds of people through world-class educations. Of the AIEF’s alumni, 95 per cent engage in career paths.