

Love of drama signals path to better future



ELIAS VISONTAY

As a Year 12 student at Loreto Normanhurst in Sydney's north, Leana Scott had her eyes on a commerce degree after doing a program for indigenous students at the University of NSW in school holidays last year.

Yet it was her passion for drama at high school that swayed her ultimate choice of university degree.

"I was talking with my drama teacher and I realised I like talking to people and helping them," Ms Scott said.

So the 18-year-old decided to preference a combined social work and criminology course ahead of commerce. After receiving an offer, she is now halfway through the first year of her four-year degree at UNSW.

While she is thriving in her new-found freedom and independence from living at a student residential college and being able to study what she's interested in at university — including a law elective — the impact her schooling has had on her and her family's life will be hard to forget.

Originally from the NSW town of Bourke, Ms Scott moved to Sydney to board at Loreto Normanhurst when she was 12 — a scholarship recipient of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation.

Last year, she was the 500th indigenous student the AIEF had financially supported to graduate from Year 12.

Ms Scott was later joined at Loreto Normanhurst by her younger sisters Rikki, Sarah and Erica, with all four boarding at the school during 2018 thanks to the program.

While the 10-hour-drive between Bourke and Sydney makes going home a challenge — she has visited just once this year — her ambition is to return to remote communities and employ the skills she has learned.

"I want to share the skills and knowledge I'm getting here to help others," Ms Scott said.

AIEF was established in 2008 by Andrew Penfold to fundraise for scholarships for indigenous families wanting to enrol their children in boarding schools, and provide support to them into the workforce.

JANE DEMPSTER

UNSW student Leana Scott was a beneficiary of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation