

SCHOLARSHIP GIVES INDIGENOUS STUDENTS A CHANCE

Knowledge is power for dad

JULIE CROSS

ALMOST half the residents in the Aboriginal community where Nathan Bassani grew up in are unemployed.

And those who are lucky enough to have a job earn little more than \$220 a week on average.

But life has turned out dramatically differently for Mr Bassani.

At 27, he's on a six-figure salary and is living in a four-bedroom property he bought at age 22.

He's also happily married to his teenage sweetheart, Zandalee, 28, with whom he shares a daughter Kleo, 3.

The trajectory of Mr Bassani's life changed when he was parachuted on a scholarship into one of Brisbane's top private schools.

Up until then, he had been going to the local state school in his home of Yarrabah, 55km from Cairns in Far North Queensland, which

only caters for children up to year 10.

For those wanting to continue to year 12, they have to travel 50 minutes one way.

Mr Bassani said the long commute could result in a motivation wane.

When he won a scholarship through the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF) he "took the opportunity with both hands". "I've done a lot of things I never thought I would do, like moving away from home," he said.

"Knowledge is power. It changed my life completely."

Mr Bassani said as a boarder at Marist College Ashgrove, in Brisbane, everyone was there to learn, there were no distractions and he got lots of support from teachers who believed in him.

After school he got an apprenticeship as a diesel fitter and put in some hard graft in the mines, where he was able to save up for a deposit for his

house. Not every child in Yarrabah, which has a population of fewer than 3000, can or would like to get a scholarship to go to boarding school, but seeing others succeed can only be a good thing, according to AIEF chief executive Andrew Penfold.

"One of the things people question is the value of education," Mr Penfold said.

"To see a real example like Nathan, who has done something amazing in his life, it creates a ripple effect of high expectations, whether that be for his siblings or others in the community."

AIEF supports about 350 students a year through scholarships, with the funding coming from private business and matched by the government.



Nathan Bassani and his wife Zandalee, 28, and their daughter Kleo, 3, and (left) in action for the Central Queensland Capras rugby league team.