

## Gulf scholarship holder's ticket to ride

*TSSSS-chuh.*

The air brakes hissed and Dakota Callope felt the heaving crowd brush past her.

Loose change clanked into the bottom of a tin and a horn broke through the humid air.

The thrumming of traffic into the heart of the city felt so different to the world she'd known just a few days earlier.

Suddenly, she felt a little overwhelmed. She was just 12 years old and a long way from Little River.

"I wasn't used to big public transportation back then," the Croydon-raised teenager says, describing her first bus ride in Townsville.

"It really was scary."



**Croydon student Dakota Callope.**

Today, Dakota is 18 and speaks with poise and confidence. She's on the cusp of graduation and grateful for the experiences at the Cathedral School of St Anne and St James.

Boarding almost 700km from home while studying was hard. She missed mum, missed fishing

with dad and mucking around with her nine other siblings.

But, just like riding the bus, she got used to it and the pain was worth it.

"I think it took me till the end of grade nine before I started to feel confident with routines and not having to depend on everyone else," Dakota said.

"It was freeing to know I didn't have to rely on anyone anymore. My social life peaked at that time and it still is. I'm still making friends now."

Earlier this month, Dakota joined 75 other graduates from across Australia at the Sydney Opera House.

The group were all part of the Australian Indigenous Edu-

cation Foundation, a body that provides scholarships to families who choose to enrol their children in boarding schools.

Executive director Andrew Penfold said many of the students faced significant challenges just to finish Year 12.

"We are very proud of all this year's scholarship graduates," Mr Penfold said.

"We can't wait to see the paths they blaze, and hear more strong, educated, powerful and deadly Indigenous voices."

Dakota plans to work in child care in Alice Springs.

"I really like working with kids and they're looking for more workers over there."

*— Story by Samuel Davis*