

Program puts Marni on learning curve that crosses PM's path



Marni Morris, right, with her best friend Ava Moran at the Presbyterian Ladies' College in Croydon, Sydney, on Thursday

BRITTA CAMPION



NOAH YIM

When 14-year-old Marni Morris delivers an acknowledgement of country in front of Anthony Albanese and a crowd of hundreds on Friday, she will be thinking of her mum and her grandma.

"To me, being Aboriginal means family, home, culture and language," Marni will tell the Economic Outlook Forum, hosted by The Australian.

"Yesterday was my grandma's birthday so being here to speak with you all today is the best gift I could give her and my mum. I know they are proud of me sharing my story and culture with you all today."

Marni, a proud Gamilaraay girl from Walgett, NSW, has been boarding at the Presbyterian Ladies' College in Croydon, Sydney, since 2021 thanks to an Australian Indigenous Education Foundation scholarship.

AIEF executive director Andrew Penfold said it was "inspiring to hear the voices of the next generation of young Indigenous leaders, like Marni, talking about the issues that affect them, their families and their communities".

The foundation has supported 1200 students since 2008.

"Through an AIEF scholarship, students develop the capacity, knowledge and skills to be able to navigate into a successful career, take their place in the world and make an impact," Mr Penfold said.

The aim of the foundation, Mr Penfold said, was to support young Indigenous people to "get a great education and finish school". And it appears to be succeeding.

The Year 12 completion rate for the AIEF scholarship program, which provides scholarships at leading Australian boarding schools, was 95 per cent last year.

That compares with 38 per cent of Indigenous students completing Year 12 at public schools across NSW.

About her speech in front of the Prime Minister, Marni said she was "feeling nervous and excited".

Nervous because she doesn't want to mess up any words, and excited because she loves public speaking.

She been attending public speaking classes at the boarding house since Year 7, and says they "improved her confidence".

When Marni meets Mr Albanese, she has been advised by her deputy principal to break the ice by making sure she mentions, with a big smile, her family's long-term support of the Prime Minister's beloved rugby league team, South Sydney.

Ninety-three per cent of AIEF graduates from 2008 to 2022 are working, at university or in some other "productive engagement".