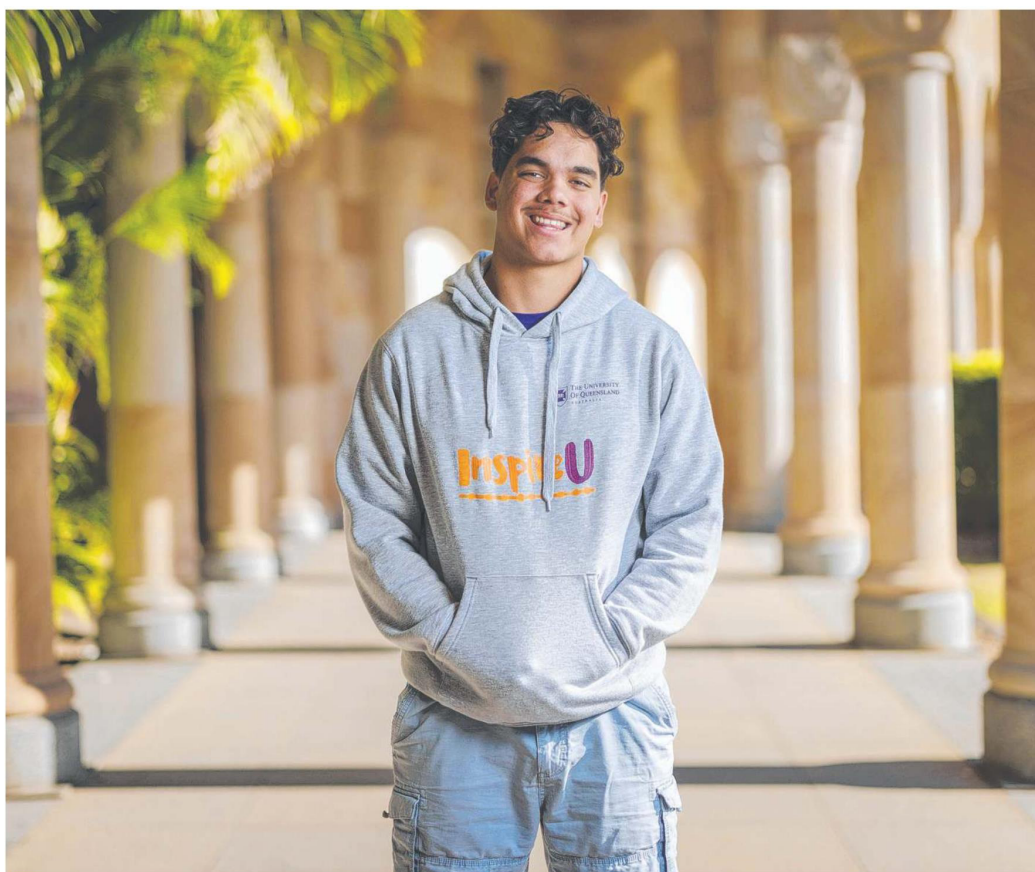


Scholarship will bring health to med student's island home



GLENN HUNT

Torres Strait Islander Kibbim Titasey, 18, who is studying medicine at the University of Queensland, on Thursday

JOANNA PANAGOPOULOS

As Kibbim Titasey moved from Thursday Island to rural Atherton to Cairns, he saw the different lives he might have lived fall away.

If the 18-year-old had stayed on Thursday Island, he would have likely been a crayfish diver working under his uncle – which he thinks he would have liked. In Atherton, most of his peers at the state school picked up a trade, which he says wouldn't have satiated his appetite for education and learning.

Now, having attended high school at St Augustine's College in Cairns on an Australian Indigenous Education Foundation scholarship and seeing his brother study medicine after also completing an AIEF scholarship, his dream is to become a doctor.

He is pre-med, studying a Bachelor of Health Science at the University of Queensland, and eventually wants to return home



to the Torres Strait and work in emergency medicine up there.

Without a full scholarship, he wouldn't have been able to attend St Augustine's College, he says.

"Part of the reason I moved from home was education and the way things are run up there. I want to try to put a dint in that. A lot of my extended family on my father's side, the Torres Strait Islander side, suffer from chronic diseases. And part of that is a lack of education.

"I moved away from home in grade 3 or 4 ... As I moved, I could see the big difference in education. Having moved to the mainland, I had a massive advantage over my peers who stayed in the Torres Strait until high school," he said.

The year 12 completion rate of

AIEF students was 95 per cent in 2022. That's compared to 38 per cent of Indigenous students who completed year 12 in NSW, based on a 2022 Department of Education report.

One-third of the 60 year 12 students were from remote or very remote communities, and one-fifth of alumni were working or studying in these communities.

The retention rate of the 295 students in 2022 was also 95 per cent.

AIEF executive director Andrew Penfold said these stats came down to a combination of selecting properly resourced schools with high-quality teachers, real enthusiasm from parents and students, and additional supports like career sessions and mentoring.

He said they don't claim to be the single solution for the very significant gap between year 12 completion rates for Indigenous students in Australia and non-Indigenous students, but had a "unique model" that created "an

amazing environment for Indigenous students to succeed".

"Students who are engaged and enthusiastic about their education with supportive parents and families who go to high-performing schools with quality teaching and learning and comprehensive extra-curricular programs and culturally welcoming environments have a very high success rate," Mr Penfold said.

He said when those high-performing schools are willing to accept more students, yet students are denied entry because of lack of funding, we "get to the crux of the problem".

"It's kind of a perverse situation when you've got such high demand for quality schooling opportunities, proven track records with programs like ours, but insufficient funding support to enable those Indigenous families to seize the opportunities," Mr Penfold said.

Some 1200 students have gone through the AIEF scholarships program since 2008.