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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDEPENDENCE

# media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

8 February, 2010

## **Educational Scholarships are making a difference – but closing date near, says Land Councillor**

In line with its ethos of doing all it can to improve the lives of Aboriginal people – the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council is once again funding educational scholarships under its unique, twin scholarships program.

In the last two years these scholarships have already helped close to 240 Aboriginal people throughout the State to continue their education – be it at primary school, secondary school, TAFE or tertiary level.

NSWALC's Deputy Chairperson, Tom Briggs pulls no punches when he states that the creation of the second part of the scholarship program was one of the best initiatives approved by the organisation's current, elected nine member governing council.

"It helps fill gaps and provide scholarships in areas where nobody else will," Councillor Briggs said.

"A recent report to the United Nations has reinforced the crucial importance of education and the need for scholarship opportunities such as those offered to Aboriginal people by NSWALC.

The Report, on the state of the World's Indigenous Peoples devotes an entire chapter to the crucial needs for education for our people," Councillor Briggs added.

The report notes that the education attainment gap between Indigenous peoples and the rest of the population remains critical.

"Every effort needs to be made to close that gap", it states. "The report has also emphasized that education is a fundamental human right, in itself, and a primary vehicle for people to contribute both at an individual and community level.

"The recent release of this report is a timely reminder that we must do all that we can to actively promote participation in ongoing education for our people through programs such as the NSWALC education scholarships," Councillor Briggs said.

"I urge everyone who is eligible to think about applying.

“The cut off date is nearly upon us. Applications close on February 26”.

Councillor Briggs said all information on the scholarships program – including application forms –were available from Margaret Dent at the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) on telephone 02 99299633

The twin arms of the scholarships program are scholarships under the \$30 million dollar exclusively NSWALC funded Educational Endowment Fund and the separate Freddy Fricke scholarships which sought to address the lack of Aboriginal people working in the professions, including medicine, finance and commerce. These were originally established from the sale of property Mr Fricke willed to the Aboriginal Land Council many years ago.

Two examples of Freddy Fricke scholarship winners are Bachelor of Medicine student at the University of Newcastle, Sean White and from the same university, Jenna Marie Eastwood, who is close to finishing her degree in medical radiation science.

“I have made the establishment of partnership arrangements to encourage my people to complete their education as one of my major initiatives” Councillor Briggs said. It is wonderful to see a local person entering the final leg of his studies to become a doctor”.

“I’m completing my final year of study, “said Sean, who hails from Manilla, and who entered medicine as a mature aged student. “I can honestly say I probably wouldn’t have been able to hang in and meet all of the costs associated with doing a five-year medical degree if I hadn’t received a NSWALC scholarship.

“It’s as simple as that”.

Sean, now 36, said Aboriginal people such as himself had many hurdles to overcome – perhaps more than most – when they entered on the path of tertiary study, particularly when undertaking such expensive and lengthy degrees such as medicine.

“Cost is but one of the factors, others include family and living away from home,” he said.

Sean said his interest in medicine had blossomed over the years, from when he completed his initial high school studies.

“While I spent my formative years in Manilla, my mother’s people are Barkandji Darling River people from far western NSW (Wilcannia) and my father is Kamilaroi (Quirindi)

Sean added that when he left school in Sydney he entered the State Public Service for a number of years and that it was during this period that he decided he needed a new challenge and pursued medicine.

Sean said during 2010, his final year, he would apply for internships at rural hospitals throughout New South Wales

Sean said he was well aware of the acute shortage of Aboriginal doctors – but the situation was improving. There are about 140 Indigenous doctors and 137 Indigenous medical students nationally.

Sean is a member of the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA), an organization based in Canberra. AIDA was dedicated to Indigenous health and was committed to increasing the number of Indigenous doctors.

“AIDA has also provided support throughout my degree, such as mentoring and networking with Indigenous medical graduates.

“Various programs to help exist, he said, and Newcastle University had a strongly supportive program for its Aboriginal medical students.

“We are seeing more and more Aboriginal people entering medicine – or medical studies at one level or another,” Sean said.

Testimony to this fact and just how much the NSWALC scholarships can help also came from 22-years old Jenna Eastwood, from Newcastle.

Jenna is in the final year of a Bachelor of Medical Radiation Science (diagnostic radiography) at the same University as Sean.

“I am an only child and my mum is a single mum. I just couldn't have afforded this degree without this scholarship,” Jenna said.

“It has paid a great deal of my expenses – expenses such as living away from home to complete yearly 10-weeks long community placements,” she said. And like Sean, Jenna also completed a special one-year University based bridging course to get her ready for full university entry.

She said she would feel a tremendous sense of achievement once she completes her degree and the extra year of training she also has to complete before gaining her formal qualifications as a diagnostic radiographer.

“I'm over the worst and I'm now, so to speak, in the home straight”.

The NSWALC funded, \$30 million Educational Endowment Fund scholarships were established three years ago during the world's massive economic turn down.

“To find \$30 million dollars of our own money to fund these scholarships clearly indicates just how much importance elected Council members place on seeing more and more Aboriginal people complete their education.

“After all, they are our future and the more we can see entering the professions, the trades, teaching – whatever – the better it will be,” Chairperson Manton.

Two solid examples of how the general Educational Endowment Fund scholarships can help came from first year recipients in the Wiradjuri Region in then Year 8 student at Hay’s War Memorial High School, Lara Jane Woods and mature aged student from Bathurst, Maureen Bates McKay.

Laura is disabled student and her disability required her to attend therapy three or four times a week, which she did despite having to travel some distance for her treatment.

By contrast, Maureen Bates McKay has raised three daughters, all of whom completed high school with one studying at tertiary level, before having the time – or money – to think about going back to school to further her own education.

“I have always been a great believer in the value of education,” she said. “I had always wanted to study law and be admitted to the bar. There are far too few Aboriginal faces in the legal profession. I have struggled to bring up my family and afford study. This scholarship will be an enormous help to me.

“I am overwhelmed – but at the same time extremely grateful to be a recipient,” Maureen said when gaining her scholarship in 2008.

Lara and Maureen are but two of nearly 270 Aboriginal people who have already been helped significantly as scholarship recipients.

“Last year eight North West Region young people gained scholarships,” Councillor Briggs said. “Six of them were from Coonabarabran, one from Wanaruah and one from Nungaroo”

The six from Coonabarabran were Quaid Munson, Chloe Sutherland, Allynta Sutherland and Evan, Jackson and Tristan Sulter while Breanna Casserly was the Wanaruah recipient and Kaleb Taylor the successful applicant from Nungaroo.

“I’m hoping there will be more winners – winners from even more places – this year.

“We will keep these initiatives going – they truly do make a difference,” Councillor Briggs said.

“But don’t forget, applications close on February 26”.

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Further information Councillor Tom Briggs  
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