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media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

Get in your scholarship applications, urges Land Councillor

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The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council's Sydney/Newcastle representative, Councillor Roy Ah-See, today urged Aboriginal people throughout his Region to apply for NSWALC-sponsored educational scholarships – scholarships that really do make a difference.

“My Region had by far the highest number of scholarship winners - 40 - last year. I want to maintain that record,” Councillor Ah-See said.

“After all, only recently a United Nations report has highlighted the crucial importance of education and the need for scholarship opportunities such as those offered to Aboriginal people by NSWALC. The report noted that the education attainment gap between Indigenous peoples and the rest of the population remains critical.”

Councillor Ah See said he was aware of numerous examples of just how much the NSWALC scholarships had made a real difference.

A classic example was mature aged student, Deborah Swan, from Toukley on the Central Coast of NSW.

Deborah, 45 a single mum who has raised two children, now aged 23 and 15 years respectively, is a member of the Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council which is situated on the Pacific Highway at Watanobbi.

“Without this scholarship I don't think I could have afforded to complete my Diploma in Natural & Cultural Resource Management,” Deborah said. “I am doing this degree through Deakin University in Victoria as it is one of only two Universities that offer this particular course.

“It is of particular relevance to my work as a full-time culture and educational officer with Darkinjung and definitely makes studying less stressful when you know you don't have a debt from trying to better educate yourself for your family and community.”

Deborah said like many Aboriginal people she had completed many short courses but wanted to finally undertake formal tertiary level studies.

“I finally began my diploma course in 2009 and will finish at the end of this year,” she said. “I might even think about continuing to do my Masters.

“But with working full time the work load, 25 hours a week study and also having to attend full-time block release courses each year is very demanding. Particularly as I still have a 15 year old at home.

“But I must admit gaining a scholarship from the State Land Council has made me even more determined to finish. You want to finish as a matter of pride - pride in your people, your Land Councils and pride in yourself,” she said.

“These scholarships weren’t around 20 years ago when I was young. That they are now is wonderful. They really do make a difference. They empower Aboriginal people to be able to apply for real paying jobs and have an even chance to work along with the rest of the Australian community.”

Another example of how the scholarship initiative is helping are the scholarships granted to two young Newcastle high school aged students, Djalar and Kopara Donovan, of Adamstown, who are both students at the Hunter School of Performing Arts.

“This is a selective school. Both Djalar and Kopara, who enter year 8 and 10 respectively this year, are talented musicians. One plays the clarinet, the other trumpet, “ said their father, Michael Donovan.

“Music will be their major elective throughout their high school years. There are, of course considerable costs. The NSWALC scholarship has made a real difference.

“It has being particularly helpful. It has helped enormously”.

Councillor Ah-See said NSWALC took the courageous decision three years ago to create, with its own money, a \$30 million Educational Endowment Fund. Over the past two years more than 240 people throughout the State had benefitted with scholarships at primary, secondary and tertiary level.

“To create the scholarship fund was an investment in the future of our people. The recent UN report emphasises how appropriate this decision was”.

“But I want to emphasise that the scholarship initiative is a great example of self determination, of Aboriginal people determining their own destiny through access to education. There is no doubt that Aboriginal people must continue to strive for social justice through a rights based platform.”

But time was running out for people to seek current round scholarships.

“The closing date is February 26,” he said. “Don’t miss out – get your application in”, Councillor Ah See said.

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