

RELEASED: Wednesday 4 October, 2017

Australian Story – Monday 9 October, 8pm on ABC and ABC iview

PAYING IT FORWARD – WAVERLEY STANLEY & LLEW MULLINS

It's the heart-warming love story behind one of the country's most successful programs for indigenous students.

In 2005, Aboriginal man Waverley Stanley and his now wife Llew Mullins set up Yalari, a program that selects indigenous students for scholarships to attend boarding school.

Yalari, meaning 'child' in Birra Gubba language, is a passion project for Waverley.

When he was 12, his teacher at a country Queensland public school spotted "something special" in him and arranged a scholarship at Toowoomba Grammar School.

"I just opened a door for him and he went through that door and he's done all the work. And it takes a really special boy to do that," teacher Rosemary Bishop says.

Waverley says his high-school education changed his life.

"I think the biggest change for me was the realisation that anything is possible," Waverley says.

Yalari is the love-child of Waverley and his wife, Llew, a former country singer who grew up in a white, middle class family in Sydney.

After a long and slow-burning romance, they set up Yalari from their garage in south-east Queensland.

"The purpose of Yalari is to give other indigenous children from regional, rural and remote communities the same opportunity that I had," Waverley says.

Yalari now turns over millions of dollars in corporate and government funds and helps 170 students a year gain an education at some of Australia's top boarding schools including Geelong Grammar and St Margaret's in Brisbane.

“Waverley and I and Yalari, it’s a black and white love story,” Llew says.

“It was born out of love. Yalari wouldn’t exist without Waverley and I, but I don’t think Waverley and I would exist without Yalari.”

Waverley says neither of them saw colour when they got together.

“It’s just a beautiful love story, full stop. It’s just two people coming together with a united goal to make a difference, and I believe we are.”

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