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### 2025 AAL Scholarship recipient dedicated to reconciliation and empowerment

Conversations with her grandparents about the discrimination and racism they endured sparked Rikisha Phineasa's ambition to become a lawyer and advocate for her people.

A proud Torres Strait Islander woman who grew up in Cairns and Townsville, 22-year-old Rikisha is the 2025 recipient of the [Australian Academy of Law's](#) First Nations Scholarship.

She was only 17 when she started her degree in Law and Arts (Indigenous Studies) at [James Cook University](#), Queensland and she has worked consistently at her studies, extra-curricular volunteering, and paid employment ever since.

Rikisha says her grandparents' strength and resilience helped foster her own determination and perseverance:

**'Talking to my relatives and hearing about their lived experience lit a flame for me. I come from a long line of ancestors who have suffered discrimination and survived – because I have been blessed with education and support, I feel I have a responsibility now to carry the torch.'**

Rikisha has an accomplished academic record and an extensive list of community work experience and volunteering. She is a member of the Commonwealth's [First Nations Youth Advisory Group](#) and Co-Convenor of the Youth Design Group for the [National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition](#). She also works as a Litigation Officer with [Legal Aid Queensland](#).

The AAL First Nations Scholarship is financed substantially by the generosity of donors to the Academy's Public Fund. The \$6000 award is designed to help an Indigenous student through the arduous final year of a Law degree with both funding and the assistance of an AAL Fellow as a mentor.

The Hon Pamela Tate AM KC chaired this year's judging panel. The other panel members were the Hon Justice Lincoln Crowley and Professor Natalie Skead.

Pamela says they were impressed with Rikisha's dedication to reconciliation and empowerment:

**'The judging panel considered Rikisha to have demonstrated consistent academic excellence in her studies. She also has substantial community involvement and experience. It is clear she is determined to use her education and work experience to benefit her People and the Australian community and is well placed to be a future First Nations leader in the Law.'**

Rikisha describes the scholarship as an honour and a privilege which will help her balance academic excellence with her commitment to legal volunteer work, without the constant need to find the money to pay the bills.

She says youth is her focus and her passion:

**'I want to lift them up, activate their potential and, where possible, keep them out of the legal system. I feel strongly that we need to work towards system change and invest hope in First Nations Young people. I want to give back – that's my number one goal.'**

Ends

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