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How a street waif found a shining future



"I now have a future, an exciting future" ... Cyril Johnson, the boy rescued from the streets of Broken Hill, at St Ignatius' College, Riverview, yesterday.

Photo: *Kate Geraghty*

Miranda Devine
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WHEN Cyril Johnson was eight, his mother moved away and he was left to fend for himself on the streets of Broken Hill.

"I felt lost, annoyed and scared," he says. "I can remember walking around [at night] crying and shivering."

Then the local butcher, Dean "Bucky" Meadows, and his wife, Sue, took him in and made him part of their family. Today, in his private school blazer and tie, the self-assured year 11 boarder at St Ignatius' College, Riverview, is a long way from that frightened, homeless waif.

Cyril, 17, is one of a generation of indigenous boys and girls on scholarships who are attending elite secondary boarding schools in Sydney, such as Riverview.

"I have moved away from my family to attend this fine school," he said in a speech to a recent school assembly. "I am the first person in my family to have received my school certificate. I will be the first person in my family to receive my High School Certificate and maybe even the first to attend university ... I now have a future, an exciting future."

Cyril paid tribute to his mother. "My mum suffered a mental illness and I know now that she didn't understand what was happening to her but also had little support ... I'm so grateful to my mum for recognising what would be best for me and I know that handing me over to my new family was hard."

Bucky, 45, who now drives taxis in Broken Hill and hopes to start a go-kart track for indigenous youth, remembers the "quiet little mouse" who came to stay for a night and never left, who used to stash half a hamburger under the bed, just in case. "In a way we feel pretty honoured that his mother trusted us to look after him."

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