

ALFABET

NEWSLETTER OF THE ABORIGINAL LITERACY FOUNDATION

WINTER 2022

Ear Health

The ALF's new children's book to reduce the spread of preventable ear disease

Also in this edition

Tutoring Programs

Distance Education

Books to the North



IN THIS ISSUE

Ear Health Awareness	Page 4
Tutoring Programs	Page 5
Inner City Tutoring	Page 6
Literacy and Heritage Camps	Page 7
Literacy Testing	Page 7
Distance Education	Page 8
Books to the North	Page 9

BOOKS TO THE NORTH PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

NORTHERN TERRITORY

St Philip's College
Mamaruni School
Yipirinya School
MacFarlane Primary School
Xavier Catholic College
St Josephs Catholic College
The Essington School
Pine Creek School
Karama School
Clyde Fenton Primary School
Kintore St School
Bulla Camp School
Malak Reengagement Centre
Lajamanu School
Epenarra School
St Pauls Catholic Primary School
Rosebery Middle School
Mackillop Catholic College
Centralian Middle School
Tennant Creek High School
OLSH Catholic College
 - Traeger Campus
 - Sadadeen Campus
 - Bath Street Campus
Milyakburra
Kormilda College
St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary School
Northern Territory School of Distance Education
Bradshaw Primary School
Forrest Parade School
Tipperary Station School
Woolianna School
Ludmilla Primary School
Yarralin School
Wulagi Primary School
Mutitjulu School
Taminmin College
Manunda Terrace Primary
Rosebery Primary School
Katherine High School
Yirrkala School
Yirara College

Henbury School
Belyuen School
Driver Primary School
Tivendale School
Ross Park Primary
Alcoota School
Baniyala Garrangali School
Adelaide River Primary
Mulga Bore School
Sacred Heart Primary School
Dundee Beach School
Douglas Daly School
St Francis Xavier Catholic School

QUEENSLAND

St Joseph's Catholic School Clermont
Mount Garnet State School
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
Collinsville State School
Capella State School
Mer Eruer Uteb -Tagai State College
Cunnamulla State School
Scottville State School
Pentland State School
Lakeland State School
Murray River Upper State School
Isisford State School
St. Michaels Palm Island Catholic School
Townsvlew State School
Dajarra State School
St George State School
Barcaldine Prep -12 State School
St Joseph Catholic Primary School
St Mary's School
Longreach State High School
Alpha State School
Calen District State College
St George State High School
Mitchell State School
Collinsville State High School
Longreach State School
Wandoan State School P-10
Forsayth State School
Charleville School of Distance Education

Mount Isa Central State School
St. Patricks Catholic School
Capella State High School
Windorah State School
Tagai State College
Morrington Island State School
Wallumbilla State School
CYAAA - Coen Campus
CYAAA - Hope Vale Campus
Normanton State School
Tagai State College - Kubin Ngurpay Lag
Clermont State High School
Tagai State College -Thursday Island
Campus
Camooweal State School

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Millers Well Primary School
Pegs Creek Primary School
Tom Price Primary School
Hedland Senior High School
Yakanarra Community School
Pia Wadjarri RCS
Yiyili Aboriginal Community School
Wyndham District High School
Holy Rosary School
Kururrungku Catholic Education Centre
Birlirr Ngawiywu
Karratha Primary School
Baler Primary School
Ngalangangpum School
One Arm Point R.C.S.
Roebuck Primary School
Jigalong Remote Community School
Carnarvon Christian School
Meekatharra District High School
Yandeyarra Remote Community School
Cassia Primary School
North Tom Price Primary School
Purnululu School
Nyikina Mangala Community School

CEO'S REPORT

Dear supporters of the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation,

We've had a wonderful start to 2022. Unlike the last two years, most students are back at school and most of our tutors and workers are able to come into the office. We've been most fortunate to have some new staff to join us over the last few months: Our long time Office Manager Jacinta Humphries left at the end of last year and we're most fortunate to have Christine Beswick who has joined us from Sovereign Hill, where she was part of the administrative team. Sam Sherrard has also joined us to support our IT and social media.

We have been able to restart our Junior Literacy Program with the help of Aunty Anne Patmore-Cooper who has agreed to be our First Nation mentor to these students.

Our Aboriginal Art Program has continued to enjoy enormous success and we look forward to holding our

annual exhibition throughout July. Our thanks to Aunty Janet Curtain for the energy she always lends to this popular program.

Since our last newsletter, many areas of New South Wales and Southern Queensland have been badly affected by the recent floods. We have just established a new program to provide support for nearly fifty schools that have been affected. This program will involve the distribution of books and the provision of library and IT equipment.

This event was an enormous setback for many students, particularly after two years of COVID restrictions and 'learning from home'.

We are also aware of how many of our supporters would like to play a greater personal role in Aboriginal Literacy programs. We encourage our

supporters to nominate which of our programs they would like their donation to be directed.

Later in the year, we will also be able to re-establish many of the volunteer opportunities that were paused throughout the Pandemic. In the past, this included corporate book sorting days and volunteering at Literacy and Heritage Camps.*

Thank you so much again for your support and we wish you all well for the latter part of the year.

Dr Anthony Cree
CEO

**Volunteering opportunities subject to qualifications and Working with Children accreditation.*



EAR HEALTH AWARENESS

The Aboriginal Literacy Foundation is producing a book aiming to reduce the terrible spread of preventable ear infections as part of our ear health awareness campaign.

The Centre of Research Excellence in Ear and Hearing Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children (CRE ICHEAR) in 2020 found that only one in ten Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory aged three or younger have healthy ears, and 90% have some form of middle ear infection (otitis media). Five in ten have effusive otitis media (causing a discharge from the ear) with the remaining four in ten suffering from acute or chronic otitis media, which may then cause perforation to the ear drum which can only be restored by surgery.

All forms of otitis media can cause hearing loss, putting almost all children in remote communities

at risk of language delay, speech problems, social isolation, poor school attendance, reduced education, and diminished employment opportunities. This preventable ear disease can create immeasurable disruption to a child's life if allowed to progress.

Several significant risk factors are understood, particularly poor infrastructure and overcrowding in buildings, exposure to tobacco smoke, and hygiene. With hygiene as the method most in a person's control, we have decided to create a book highlighting the ways that these infections can be prevented, particularly for children. Examples put forward by the Menzies School of Health Research are for sick children to keep away from babies, to frequently wash and dry their hands, to cough into their elbows, and to keep their faces clean if they have a runny nose – especially important in crowded areas.

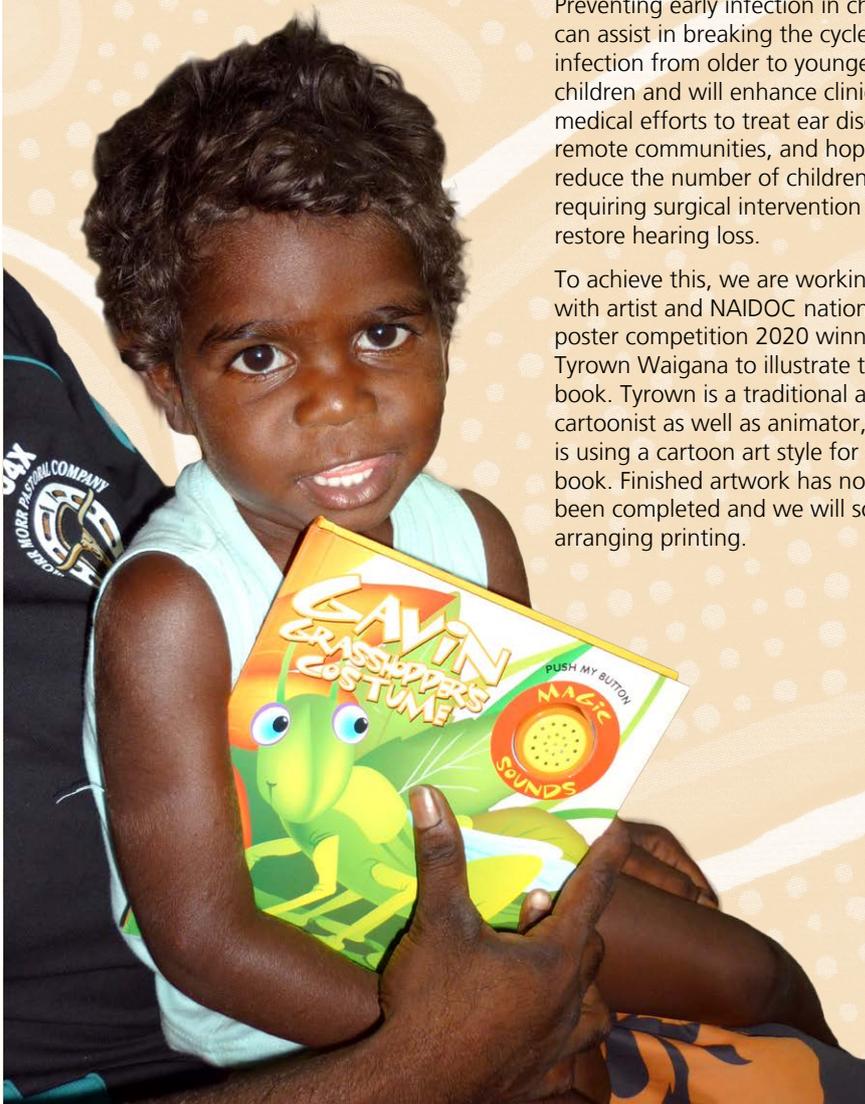
Preventing early infection in children can assist in breaking the cycle of infection from older to younger children and will enhance clinical and medical efforts to treat ear disease in remote communities, and hopefully reduce the number of children requiring surgical intervention to restore hearing loss.

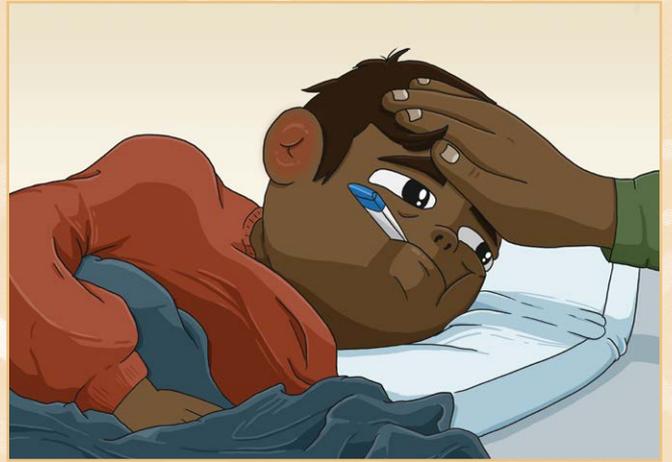
To achieve this, we are working with artist and NAIDOC national poster competition 2020 winner Tyrown Waigana to illustrate the book. Tyrown is a traditional artist, cartoonist as well as animator, who is using a cartoon art style for the book. Finished artwork has now been completed and we will soon be arranging printing.

The book will be distributed for free through our network of over 150 schools to be made available to children in remote communities to inform children how they can protect their siblings and friends, and to emphasise the importance of hearing.

The book follows previous work to spread awareness of good health habits through our healthy living book series, and donations to the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation will support the creation and distribution of this book throughout regional Australia. As always, we are grateful for anything you can give to assist this important work.

“The Centre of Research Excellence in Ear and Hearing Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children (CRE ICHEAR) in 2020 found that only one in ten Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory aged three or younger have healthy ears, and 90% have some form of middle ear infection.”





TUTORING PROGRAMS

MELBOURNE INNER CITY LITERACY PROGRAMS

Our readers will know the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation is not solely concerned with regional or remote Indigenous literacy. Over the past twenty years, the ALF has run programs in inner City Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney. Often these programs are based in areas that have a substantial Indigenous population, Redfern in Sydney and Collingwood and Footscray in Melbourne are good examples.

In Collingwood, Jo Campbell has run a wonderful program for primary school Indigenous students. In Footscray, Wendy Hope has been running the program based at the Indigenous Centre at Victoria University. Wendy has had some wonderful results over the years including students who have recently entered Tertiary Education at Victoria and La Trobe Universities.

Often the key to success for these programs is the individual personality of the coordinating teacher. Both Wendy and Jo make a real effort to make every class interesting and engaging, and these programs have remained very popular.

BALLARAT BUSH GARDEN

At our new centre in Ballarat, we are most fortunate to have a garden. Several of our parents have indicated that it would be a wonderful place to have Native bush food growing so that children could recognise what is edible and good for them and what is not when they are in the bush.

Native food that can be easily grown in a suburban area include Warrigal greens, mint, and finger limes. Many of the roots which are edible require a much larger garden and more time to grow. As well as foods, we aim to plant native flax which grows by rivers and billabongs in remote parts of Australia. This flax can be used for making Aboriginal matting (for the inside of shelters) or in a string form for weaving. We have been most fortunate in the past to have had local Aboriginal cultural expert Donna Blackwell who has been able to teach our female students. We should emphasise that many of these crafts including weaving are generally regarded as being gender specific to girls rather than to boys, however we hope to have a situation where both boys and girls might be able to study this interesting topic. We have found in the past that by working on Aboriginal topics and culture that we have a far higher level of interest from the students than if we concentrate on the usual English texts. This subject is extremely meaningful and much appreciated by young Indigenous Australians.



GREETINGS FROM CHRISTINE

Hello,

I was excited to join the team at ALF in February 2022 as the new office manager. I have many years of administration experience and really like to organise things and run projects. With a history in Education and Community Service my position here with ALF was a great fit for us both.

It was a surprise for me to see the figures in relation to literacy for Aboriginal children. I guess like many I was ignorant to the facts in relation to poor literacy levels. I have raised 2 children and regularly read them books and helped with their school-work as they grew up. Being a lover of a good novel (especially on holidays) I took my reading and writing skills for granted.

I have especially enjoyed meeting and interacting with the young students that we tutor here in Ballarat. The after-school tutoring is a great service provided here. Another program I can see wonderful benefits from is the "Books to the North" program. We regularly have people bringing in children's books that they would like to donate. Usually their own children have outgrown them and they would like them to go somewhere useful. Occasionally a school will respond to our feedback form (sent with the books) and let us know what a benefit it was to the library at the remote schools. The photos sent of the kids reading the books give us a real buzz.

Outside of school and employment the need to understand signs for safety and driving has also been pressed home to me. If you are not able to pass a driving licence test then employment prospects can be very limited.

I intend to do all I can to assist ALF and their supporters to improve literacy skills to enable others to have a brighter future.

HERITAGE LITERACY CAMPS

Prior to the pandemic, the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation held weekend Heritage Literacy Camps based at Federation University Campus, Ballarat. Originally more than twenty years ago, these camps lasted a week and were held in the University Hall of Residence. Nowadays we find that we can achieve the same amount over a shorter period.

Attendance at these Camps is open to all Indigenous students and not just restricted to Victoria. In the past we have had students from as far away as the Northern Territory and Queensland attending. The basic theory of the camp is that students will learn more in an intensive three or four hour class with one tutor (or a small group of no more than three students) than they will in an ordinary classroom or an after school class when they may be tired at the end of the day. Camps have always begun with diagnostic testing to determine in which specific areas a student may be experiencing difficulty.

The remainder of the morning is spent trying to improve this particular learning issue. This means that each student's program is entirely individualised for his or her specific need.

Following the three to four hour morning session, the students enjoy a lunch which is made by volunteer parents and usually includes a wide variety of healthy food often including some Aboriginal bush tucker. After lunch the class is handed over to local elders and parents who want to be involved for a cultural program of several hours, where students learn traditional skills such as story telling, native weaving and dot painting. Another area of interest is cultural history with specific interest in local languages.

The day usually ends with a chance for the students to spend time out in the fresh air. It is a particularly popular activity for the students to undertake several hours of horse riding. It is interesting that almost every Aboriginal child seems to be able to ride a horse (even if they have never done it before) and it may very well be that the riding is the hook which gets many students to come back time and again. We find that this program provides the fastest increase in reading skills in the shortest time and is one that could be replicated by other Indigenous groups in Australia.

For many of our students, progress can be maintained by students also attending weekly tutoring classes during the school term. As we continue to develop our Distance Education program, this may also provide a facility to those families who are unable to attend in person regularly.

TESTING STUDENTS FOR LITERACY SKILLS

Twenty years ago it was almost impossible to test literacy skills in a classroom environment. In recent years, schools have updated their policy and although NAPLAN doesn't tell you the individual student's progress, it does give you a general picture for the class.

The Aboriginal Literacy Foundation has been using a variety of tests to diagnose students' learning difficulties. As well as the well regarded ACER tests (Australian Council of Educational Research), the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation uses a variety of Internationally recognised non-invasive literacy tests. These tests include the Schonell silent reading tests A and B, the University of New York Stringburg Vocab tests and the Peters Cambridge University spelling test (sometimes known as the South Australian spelling test).

These tests and several others that the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation uses are essentially diagnostic in nature and help to identify specific problems that students are experiencing with their reading. Another advantage of these International tests are that they are able to give you a specific "reading age". This means that students can see for themselves how their literacy is improving. In recent years our students literacy levels have usually improved by two or more reading years over the course of a twelve month program. This illustrates how important diagnostic testing is to achieve real benefits for our students.



DISTANCE EDUCATION

In recent years, the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation has been exploring the use of internet communication technologies to expand the reach of our programs into remote and regional Australia. It has also emerged as a significant tool in the way we respond to interruptions to a child's learning. Throughout the pandemic, nearly all children became accustomed to a very different mode of education. It was crucial for us to understand how these unique challenges may affect Indigenous young people in order to maintain our engagement with these students and best support them.

The flooding disaster in Queensland and New South Wales is another example of the large scale interruptions that can occur to childrens' education. Many schools, community libraries and families were devastated by this event and we have been able to assist by providing online tutoring and providing books to schools, families and community groups.

After the onset of the flooding, we maintained contact with the family of one of the students we support. After our scheduled sessions with this student were delayed to school closures, we were able to provide the student with a refurbished laptop to allow him to continue his sessions. We believe this shows the impact this program can have through technology and our local partnerships. The support of needatutor.com.au has once been invaluable in being able to respond effectively to such difficult and changeable circumstances.

In addition to these developments, we have continued our support to the Wiluna Remote Community School. Wiluna is a community of 691 on the edge of the Western Desert and we are in our third year of support for their students.

Our thanks to Bronwyn Covill at needatutor for her assistance in pursuing opportunities in ICT and negotiating the difficulties that arise when working in sparsely populated areas where internet connection cannot be relied upon.

FEEDBACK FROM WILUNA, WA

We had our first young male student Phillip enrolled to undertake the tutoring program early in term 1, 2022.

Phillip expressed great happiness with the results. Phillip struggles with the distractions when in class with more boisterous students, and rapidly becomes dis-engaged, if his questions and opinions aren't heard.

He explained that the one-on one format with Need a tutor helped him to understand the work, rather than just write down what was explained as expected of him. Phillip has a very low level of literacy and numeracy which, unfortunately, cannot be adequately addressed in a multiple student class. Individual attention of a tutor, working at Phillip's level, gives him a sense of achievement that he would not otherwise feel.

Katie and Brooke have been using Need a tutor since last year. Their learning and understanding of the content have greatly improved.

In fact, Katie requested an extra session weekly with 'Need a tutor' to assist her with her increased study load and help with more units. She enjoys her session and says it have improved her interest in learning and motivates her to stay on track and complete her tasks.

**students names have been changed*



BOOKS TO THE NORTH

We are now in the third year of our Books to the North program which originally started as a one-off book program for remote schools in the Northern Territory. Since then, the program has expanded to more than 150 remote and regional schools in the Northern Territory, Northern Western Australia, and Northern Queensland. This program was a pioneer and recognised a need for books at a time when programs were trending towards digital technologies. In remote communities, there are far greater connectivity and power issues that often make digital programs unsustainable. For example, a community may be serviced by one main generator and this is usually reserved for powering the service station, health facility or government department.

We have a wonderful tradition of supplying books to Northern Australia with our Healthy Living Series which was founded more than 10 years ago. Approximately 90,000 volumes of this important social and health support have been sent to schools and families in remote Northern Australia.

More than 50 inner city schools in Melbourne and Sydney have supported this program by holding book drives and fundraisers. We are so encouraged that so many young people have recognised the importance of books.

Throughout the course of the program, we have used a combination of approaches to distribute books. We have made several tours of Australia's North and we also use Australia Post and courier firms. Occasionally, supporters also volunteer to distribute books, as was the case with the Archibald family, who distributed copies of the Healthy Living Series to remote and regional schools during a holiday around Australia.

We could not possibly have achieved this wonderful outcome of supplying 100,000 books to remote schools without your help.

Thank you to all those who have supported this program.

FEEDBACK FROM KINTORE, NT

As with all schools, our budget is tight. The Aboriginal Literacy Foundation has made it possible for our many Aboriginal students to access high quality recent publications that contribute to their cultural wellbeing and promote a love of books and reading.

Our Kintore Campus library now has a very diverse range of fiction and non-fiction books. We are in the process of setting up a library at our new campus and these books will make this possible a lot sooner.



BEQUESTS

The Aboriginal Literacy Foundation is most grateful to individuals or organisations who choose to make a bequest. We would recommend that you inform your solicitor to include a bequest in your will – If you prefer, you can use the form provided below.

I _____ wish to bequeath _____ dollars to the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation.

I would like this bequest to contribute towards:

- A library for a remote school
- Extending the tutoring program
- To provide a school or post-school scholarship
- All work currently undertaken by the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation
- Other (please specify)

Please forward a copy of this form to your solicitor and a copy to the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation at info@aboriginalliteracyfoundation.org

or

Ross House
P.O. Box 315 Flinders Lane
Melbourne, Victoria, 8009

We thought it would be interesting for our readers to hear of some of the wonderful bequests we have received in recent times and what it can mean for our Indigenous students (names have been changed).

Betty Braithwaite, who has spent a lifetime as a nurse, a matron and finally as the proprietor of an aged care facility left a bequest to the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation of approximately \$50,000 and asked that it might be spent for a library at a remote Aboriginal School in Northern Australia. Not only were we able to fulfill her request, but we were able to establish two libraries one in Katherine and one in a remote settlement 150 kilometres south known as Coolabah. This has made such a difference to the students, and both libraries are open to the entire community centering as they

do on subjects of interest to Aboriginal people. (Aboriginal biography, sport, animals, nature and traditional history and art)

Mrs. **Rachel Wenzel**, who had been married to a businessman in Melbourne left \$100,000 to the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation, and asked that it might be spent on fees for an Aboriginal girl to attend a private school. As she did not elaborate, we offered this as a scholarship at one of the Aboriginal Co-Ops, and found that several girls were keen to participate. We contacted a number of private girls schools, all of whom indicated that they would contribute towards the fees and ensure that the girls complete their education. We were even able to use some of the money towards uniforms.

Jim McArthur, retired farmer in Western Victoria made a generous donation of

\$20,000. He had Aboriginal employees on his farm for many years and felt that he'd like to contribute something towards young Aboriginal people interested in working on the land but who had poor literacy skills. We approached the Aboriginal Community in several country towns and found that there was a group of young boys and girls who did want to work on the land but whose literacy skills were not up to entry into a TAFE or an Agricultural College. Special classes in this town were held and were well attended for about a year. At least three of the students were able to enter TAFE at the culmination of the program. This would not have been possible without such a wonderful donation.

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