

THE ABORIGINAL LITERACY FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

ALFABET



IN THIS ISSUE

Writing A Better Future:
A former ALF student
turns educator

Meet The Team:
Bacchus Marsh coordinator,
Sue Bacon, shares her
thoughts on Indigenous
education

Plus the latest news and
plans for the new year!

END OF YEAR NEWSLETTER 2016



CEO'S REPORT

We have had an excellent past six months with special emphasis on Aboriginal students' learning needs. In early September, we held a Literacy and Heritage Camp at Federation University, Ballarat. Groups attended from Ballarat, Creswick, Smythesdale and as far away as Melton and Bacchus Marsh.

In the morning, the camps commence with one-to-one tutoring, with literacy testing being a significant aspect of the program.

The use of laptops and literacy computer games is also important. After a casual lunch, elders, guardians and parents undertake the 'heritage' part of the camp. Students learn storytelling, painting, mat weaving and other Aboriginal skills.

The camp was very well attended and enjoyed by all.

Other programs are also important and we have ongoing tuition at our Homework Clubs in Ballarat, Bacchus Marsh, Melton, Hamilton and the Melbourne Learning Centre. In the coming years, we intend to open further tutoring groups in Eastern Victoria and interstate.

A new initiative in the past 6 months has been the Literacy at Work program. This has come about through the need for some Indigenous workers to have

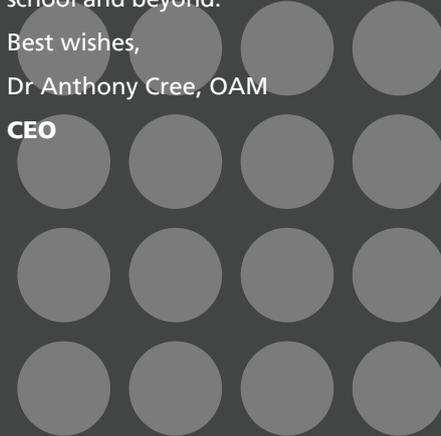
literacy support in their workplace. We are providing tutors in Sunshine and St Albans with emphasis on those working in health sector or local councils.

The ALF has also developed its Digital Literacy Hub, in which we are seeking to incorporate an Aboriginal languages supplement. When this is complete, videos, books and articles will be available in several Indigenous languages, in addition to English. We believe that efforts such as this, and particularly on digital platforms, will be crucial in helping to preserve Indigenous languages.

I would like to thank our supporters and especially those who donate. It is always appreciated and vital to our mission to see Indigenous Australians succeed at school and beyond.

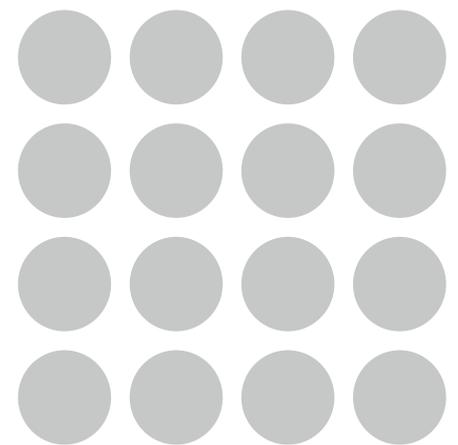
Best wishes,
Dr Anthony Cree, OAM

CEO



CONTENTS

- CEO'S REPORT • 2
- WRITING A BETTER FUTURE • 3
- MELTON IN FOCUS • 4
- MEET THE TEAM: SUE BACON • 5
- NEW PROGRAMS IN 2016 • 6
- CORPORATE SPONSORS • 6
- PHILANTHROPIC SPONSORS • 7





Keiah at Literacy and Heritage Camps in Ballarat



WRITING A BETTER FUTURE

Keiah knows firsthand the importance of education. An Aboriginal woman of the Yorta Yorta nation, she provides literacy support to inmates at Langi Kal Kal prison.

"At least a quarter don't have basic literacy skills and can't read at all," Keiah said.

"Many of them don't understand why they are in jail because they can't read the documents about their case.

"So I always tell them, 'education is the key to your future'."

Keiah's motivation to teach literacy to inmates stems from her own childhood experiences.

Her mother, Ann, constantly stressed to her children the need to keep learning.

In 1992, she arranged to have Keiah receive extra tutoring with the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) program, the forerunner of the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation (ALF).

Working in collaboration with local communities, ALF develops Indigenous children's literacy and numeracy skills so they can succeed in school and beyond.

An estimated 18 per cent of Indigenous students fail to reach the national minimal reading and writing standard in Australia, compared to 6 per cent for non-Indigenous children. Low literacy often leads to significant social disadvantage later in life.

Keiah received on-and-off tutoring from the ATAS program for 10 years. She eventually

left home and had two children with her partner, Mike.

But Keiah felt she had not fulfilled her full potential. In 2010, she talked with Uncle Wally, the head of her family and a Yorta Yorta leader. Uncle Wally suggested she do further studying.

Over the next three years, Keiah obtained a Certificate II in Business Studies and a Certificate II in Hospitality. As a result, she was able to find a job at the Aboriginal Co-op in Ballarat.

Following the birth of her third child, Keiah discovered the Federation University in Ballarat was sponsoring an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education program at Langi Kal Kal prison. She successfully applied for the position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Support Officer and now offers literacy and cultural assistance to inmates.

Certificate 11 is a special course for Indigenous students, which includes cultural studies.

"It's important that people do not lose their roots," Keiah said.

"I always sit with them one-on-one and check that they are learning and know what they are doing."

Keiah is especially proud of one of her students, who is nearing the end of his sentence and has been able to secure a place at a Ballarat TAFE.

"I'm working really hard with him to make sure his literacy is good enough to go right through the course," she said.

Keiah's final piece of advice to her students – and other Indigenous youth – is that there are no barriers that cannot be overcome.

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MELTON IN FOCUS

Our Melton Homework club has had another fantastic year with great attendance and results from students.

The Thursday afternoon sessions have been well received as a safe space for Melton Secondary School students to come and complete work from the week with our trained tutors, informally discuss school and future opportunities with the mentors, have a break from life stresses and get a bite to eat after school.

We also use the Homework Club as an opportunity to form a community within the school to provide students with the cultural support they may need. This allows students to learn different information from each other about their amazing culture. This year, we also had the opportunity to hold several cultural activities, which included music, art and history lessons.

We introduced cooking classes to the students this year with help from a dietitian from Djerriwarrh Health Services. This was greatly received and students were able to take meals home to their families with low-cost shopping lists and recipes.

We are delighted to once again be involved in this program and to be working with organisations such as AIME and Djerriwarrh Health Services.

KOOLIN BALIT BABANEK BOOBOOP PROJECT

This year we have been fortunate enough to be involved in the Melton Koolin Balit Babaneek Booboop Project, working to improve the lives of families in the Melton and Bacchus Marsh area. The project is very exciting and is off to a great start, hosting a family day in October to great reception.

Through our work with this project we have been able to connect closer with the Aboriginal Community in Melton, even assisting Kirrip Aboriginal Cooperation in setting up a library at their community house.





MEET THE TEAM: SUE BACON

Sue Bacon is the coordinator of the Bacchus Marsh Homework Club. She is also actively involved in our Literacy and Heritage Camps. Sue recently reflected on her experiences and shared her insights on teaching Indigenous children.

Have you always lived in the Bacchus Marsh area?

I've lived here for 20 years. Before that, I lived in Deer Park and in Reservoir with my grandmother—which was all bush when I lived there. I also lived in Frankston for a time, but this is the longest I've ever lived in once place! But I love it.

What sort of changes have you seen in Bacchus Marsh over the last 20 years?

I've seen it grow. The kids that were here when I arrived are now grown up. They show so much respect for me and appreciate the work we're doing, and they treat me as an elder. Occasionally, I'll be walking down the street and I'll hear "Aunty!" and it's someone I've known as a little tacker!

Everybody's so nice and friendly. I love it.

How would you describe your own experiences at school as a child?

Terrible. I got picked on because I was dark. I went home to my grandmother and I said: "Can't I get this colour off me? I want to be white like everybody else."

My son, Brian, went through it. He came home to me after he started school and said: "Mum, run me a bath. Put that stuff in it that makes you white!"

Have you seen attitudes change in your time here?

Yes, but there needs to be more reconciliation. There's good and bad in every culture, but when you see Indigenous Australians on TV, they always seem to pick the bad. Put some good things on! Look at Evonne Goolagong or Jessica Mauboy! Give credit where credit is due.

Can you explain the role of an elder in the Indigenous community and why elders are so important?

Well, it's built on respect: respect because of the experience they have gained. Elders are recognised in the community as people who possess important knowledge. We try to help the young ones by passing things on that help them get a sense of their culture and to be proud of who they are. If we don't, it's lost and we can't let it die.

Unfortunately, in many young people, there is a lack of respect.

What are the biggest obstacles facing Indigenous youth in their education?

It sometimes seems there's a willingness to push them ahead to the next grade even if they're not ready. When I went to school, you had a test every year. If you didn't pass that, you wouldn't go up. But now—up!

What's going on? I don't know if there's a lack of patience on the part of the teachers, but you've got to help the children! And to earn their respect, you must respect them.

Indigenous youth also have trouble with jobs and they struggle with stigma due to the overwhelming negativity surrounding Indigenous people in the media. A lot of them still get picked on.

Do you believe that Indigenous children respond better to a different teaching style?

It's a good question. Some of them don't pick up as well as the others and then they get behind. And when they fall behind, they're too embarrassed to ask for help. I think what they need is an Indigenous teacher, or a teacher just to help them, and once they feel like they can trust the teacher, they can ask for help. But until that trust comes, it's hard.

A lot of people come up to me and ask for help because they're not getting it from school and they can't afford tutors.

My heart goes out to them, because I know what I went through in school and I know what my boys went through at school.

How did the Bacchus Marsh Homework Club start?

I was involved with a parents group and we were throwing around ideas and I suggested that there needs to be a place where kids can come to get a bit of extra help. And then I forgot about it!

And then Anna, who was a member of the parents group, called me up and said: "Sue, are you still going on with the Homework Club?"

I asked who should I see and said: "Right—I'm going to push for this!" From there, I was directed to the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation.

How do you encourage children to come back from week to week?

Trust is important. It's a safe environment and parents and guardians are welcome.

We like to do things to make the children feel special. When each of their birthdays come around, we always sing Happy Birthday and we like to create a fun environment.

We have some dramas every now and then and I must put my foot down, but they love me and they love the tutors, Lisa, Lynn, Kathy and Eva.

What do you enjoy most about your work at the Bacchus Marsh Homework Club?

Just to see the kids come in. They put a smile on your face. They call me Aunty. I love to cook for them. Every week they come in and ask: "What are we having today, Aunty?!"

And what's the most popular dish?

Curried sausages!



NEW PROGRAMS IN 2016

The Aboriginal Literacy Foundation was delighted to launch two new programs in 2016: a new Homework Club in Hamilton, and a new program designed to assist Indigenous adults in the workplace who struggle with literacy.

Hamilton Homework Club

The Hamilton Homework Club is based on the models established in Ballarat, Bacchus Marsh, Melton and Melbourne. It is the fifth program of its kind to be operating in Victoria. The coordinator of the program is Donald White, who will tutor with Pauline Johnson. Donald previously worked at Monash College, where he prepared international students, who spoke English as a second language, for university. He has also worked at our Literacy and Heritage Camps for the past two years.

Pauline Johnson is an ATAS-registered tutor and has extensive background in the education department. She has been involved with our Literacy and Heritage Camps for over 15 years.

We are very glad to have both Donald and Pauline on board and can't wait to bring the program to Hamilton.

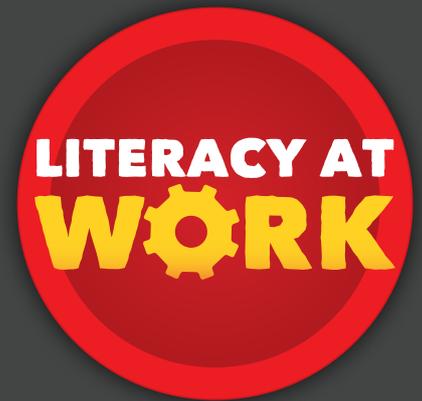
The Hamilton Homework Club is the first of two Homework Programs set to launch, with Bairnsdale being set to launch in the new year.

Literacy at Work

Literacy at Work aims to help adults who are already in the workforce but are struggling with their literacy.

This program has been developed following requests from councils and businesses. Literacy at Work involves Aboriginal Literacy Foundation tutors travelling to areas across Victoria to provide one-to-one tuition to workers who are highly valued by their employers, but struggle with aspects of their role due to literacy issues.

While our focus has historically been on early intervention and engagement strategies, we are also excited by the possibility of helping adults to not only be retained in the workforce, but also to have the best chance of ongoing success.



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