

ALFABET

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ABORIGINAL LITERACY FOUNDATION

SUMMER 2024

BOOKS TO THE NORTH

Celebrating 5 years



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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that
this publication contains images of deceased people.

CEO'S REPORT

We have had a wonderful year in 2023. The effects of COVID-19 on the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation are finally starting to wear off and we are back to roughly the same level of tutoring and book deliveries that we had before the Pandemic. With every cloud they say there's a silver lining and we've had some positive benefits from our COVID experience. Perhaps the most significant has been the development of our Distance Education Program. Originally, this was necessary after we were forced to close all our regular tutoring as required by Government regulations. Through our partnership through needatutor.com, we were able to maintain some tutoring, but we also discovered that there was a wider interest in distance education interstate. We now provide distance education using this online model in four other states, the most significant of which is our work in Western Australia in the community of Wiluna, about 600 kilometres north east of Perth. We were also able to provide tutoring to students affected by the floods in Queensland and the closed schools due to fires in Southern New South Wales. These have been wonderful developments for us and again only possible through your support.

We've had some exciting developments in our program in Melbourne. We are expanding our office at Ross House in Flinders Lane. As well as a new classroom, we are also opening the Felton Bequest Aboriginal Research Library. This is a library we have developed over thirty years and has been of special interest not only to academics and historians but also Aboriginal people

interested in rediscovering their roots. One of the most interesting aspects of the library is the first survey of Victorian Aboriginal languages that was commissioned by Governor La Trobe in 1843, when he was still Superintendent of the Port Phillip District. We are extremely grateful to the Felton Bequest Foundation who have made this development possible.

Another wonderful development has been the reestablishment of our tutoring and literacy support services in the Bairnsdale Lake Tyers area of Eastern Victoria. These programs were also affected throughout the Pandemic. Fortunately, Exxon Mobil has awarded us a wonderful grant to enable these important classes to recommence. As well as the tutoring at the local secondary and primary school, we've been able to appoint a Manager for the eastern region - Yorta Yorta man Adam Patmore, who twenty years ago was a student at our Ballarat Literacy Centre. I had the pleasure of visiting Bairnsdale for the reopening with the Managing Director of Mobil in August and was delighted at the offer of ongoing support for these programs.

Our Aspire Program for girls is now operating in three centres: Hamilton, Ballarat, and Melbourne. The Program is important for a number of reasons, most notably, to encourage girls to stay on and complete their education, but equally important is the research we expect will come from this program which will

have important ongoing implications for Indigenous womens education nationally.

Finally, we are grateful for all the support that we have been shown in the last six months. We are particularly thankful for the wonderful bequest of Mrs. Hughes of \$100,000.00. This extraordinary act of generosity will enable us to expand our program, not only in Victoria but also in the Northern Territory and Northern Western Australia where we are keen to develop our Books to the North Program further and also encourage remote Indigenous students to consider our online Distance Education options.

Thank you once again to everyone who supported the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation this year. It is well known that we have no Government funding and we rely heavily on volunteers and the wonderful financial support that you provide for us. Have a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year and we look forward to being in touch with you in 2024.

Dr Tony Cree

Below: Dr Tony Cree, Longford Plants Manager Clinton Gentle, and Adam Patmore.



ASPIRE FOR GIRLS SUCCESS

The Aspire Program is an aspirational program of academic tutoring and personal mentoring, which has been built to advance the education and life possibilities of young Indigenous girls. We currently have several programs running which are showing good success.

The Aspire program runs throughout the year and regularly brings together groups of Indigenous girls aged between 10 and 16 years. Participants in the program mainly come from households and schools that are already known to the Foundation via programs and partnerships; although the program is also marketed to nearby schools and communities to attract new applicants.

First and foremost, we aim to see the participants of this program meet and surpass the universal literacy and numeracy tests undertaken in Australian schools. Secondly, we aim to assist the girls in their progression and successful completion of secondary school. And lastly, while undertaking their studies, the program also aims to provide excellent mentoring and pastoral care for the girls. These resources provide another avenue of support, and we hope, a source of inspiration. We aim to assist the girls in reaching their academic and personal goals, and to become the leaders of tomorrow.

A recent survey with the girls has brought many positive comments: When asked "What do you like most about it?" responses included "Being able to learn and understand things better." Also "When the people that teach you create a relationship with you, you feel more comfortable in learning."

The girls have responded very positively to the design and content of Aspire. Some ringing endorsements include: "It makes me feel a lot smarter", "The activities are fun" and "It makes me feel proud and confident". This sense of pride and empowerment is a ringing endorsement of this pedagogical initiative and more broadly, the Foundation itself.

The Aspire program is only made possible through the support of our generous donors, corporate sponsors, and benefactors. We and the girls in the Aspire program say "Thank You."

When the people
that teach
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SCHOLARSHIPS

The Board of the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation has passed a motion that each year we shall provide a number of scholarships for Aboriginal students. It has been decided that there will be up to five junior scholarships and one senior each year for a VCE student.

When a suitable VCE applicant is not found, the scholarship will be suspended until the following year. It should be noted that many private schools that have considerable fees are prepared to work with the ALF in providing part of the costs involved. An important aspect of our program will be the provision for the cost of uniforms, and extra curricular programs. In the past, it has been the lack of support in this area that has been particularly upsetting for some students and on more than one occasion an Indigenous scholarship student has dropped out simply because they couldn't afford the school uniform.

We will be making the Aboriginal Scholarships the subject of a campaign with a view to expanding the program to more students. We are aware that so many talented students leave school before they have reached Year 10, and we feel that these scholarships can make a real difference.



BOOK WEEK

Each year schools across the country celebrate Book Week. This annual event promotes the importance of reading and the joy that can be found in books. Schools, libraries, booksellers, authors, illustrators, and children come together to celebrate literature in a whole host of events. Many schools hold a costume parade encouraging the children to dress up as a character from a book.

Book Week 2023 was held between August 19th-25th. The theme of 'Read, Grow, Inspire.' celebrates the way books nurture a child's inner world, planting the seed of inspiration to express their own creativity. In this way, children are like plants and literature is the sun, the soil, and the water. With literature, students can grow and flourish. This not only celebrates the wonderful relationship between children

and books but also honours the authors and the role they play in a child's development.

Anything that can nurture a child's passion for reading is an important cause. This is what Book Week is all about with the primary aim of the event being to share great works of children's literature and spark a love of reading that will stay with young people for life.

In this modern digital age, we are at risk of neglecting books more than ever. Through absolutely no fault of their own, children are exchanging a good adventure story for an interactive game on their tablets. We believe there is so much to be gained from a good book. It is especially important that there is a good supply of books in regional and remote areas where electricity may not always be available.

Book Week gives children, teachers, home educators, parents, and guardians a reason to dive into the world of children's books together. They're exposed to new authors and their works, providing a refreshing choice of literature to choose from. By creating an annual event to celebrate reading that everyone looks forward to, children are likely to look back with fond memories and continue reading as a hobby later on in life.

We all know how important reading is for children's cognitive and emotional development. It equips them with vital literacy skills and widens the scope of their imagination.

Below: Aboriginal Literacy Foundation students at Book Week 2023



JUNIOR ABORIGINAL LITERACY

The Aboriginal Literacy Foundation centre in Ballarat has been running a weekly class for elementary school students (Prep to Year 4). This has come about following recent research which found that Indigenous students who are not functionally literate readers by Year 4, have a 50% chance of remaining illiterate for the rest of their lives. This occurs for a number of reasons including social, whereby a student prefers to withdraw from a class or even not come to school at all.

An important aspect of the junior program is to concentrate on providing interesting and culturally relevant material. Students must feel that reading is a worthwhile activity, and that it is not something which is arduous and hard to do. We also recognise that a high percentage of parents are themselves not functionally literate and find it hard to help children acquire reading skills.

While the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation has no desire to enter the long standing

debate of the relative value of the phonics as opposed to the 'whole of word' system of teaching children to read, our experience has been over more than twenty years is that Aboriginal students, particularly boys, respond better to the phonics method and are usually reading satisfactorily by the end of Year 4.

Celebrating 5 Years BOOKS TO THE NORTH

In 2018, following a request from a remote Northern Territory school, we commenced our Books to the North Program. The idea was to provide children in remote Indigenous communities with high quality reading material in the form of children's books. Government agencies had started to concentrate on computers and digital reading matter, which often didn't work in remote schools. Some schools having no electricity and relying on generators (often one per settlement and usually based at the service station), other schools had limited internet access which made online education platforms unviable.

As the program rolled out, we were approached by many other principals and head teachers, and by the end of the first year we had provided books for nearly 50 remote schools.

Sourcing the books became central to the operation and we were pleased to have many city schools holding book drives so that unwanted or outgrown children's books could be sorted, packed and sent north by the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation from our Melbourne book depository, then based in Russell Street.

The first schools participating in Melbourne included Melbourne Grammar School, St Katherine's, Lowther Hall, and Ruyton Grammar. By the end of the following year schools in Sydney and Brisbane had also organised book drives and contributed to the program.

By 2020 the Books to the North program had expanded to include more than 150 remote schools in the Northern Territory, north Western Australia and Queensland. At this stage, we were sending up to 100,000 books a year.

In 2022, we decided to republish our Healthy Living series of 4 books, and also we commissioned a 5th book in the series at the request of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons. The book was cartoon based and explained the dangers of ear infection to Indigenous children. Up to 5% of Indigenous children at this stage had had some form of serious brain infection, including meningitis and many others simply couldn't hear, and therefore couldn't learn to read. Complete sets of these books were forwarded to every school with the offer of further sets if required.

This important program, which has now been replicated by several state education departments, and mentioned in the Federal Parliament has only been possible through the wonderful generosity of our supporters. On behalf of all the Aboriginal children in remote schools in the north of Australia, we say a hearty thank you.



Kintore Street School in Katherine write, "The Aboriginal Literacy Foundation has

In addition to our 150 schools, we have also supported the following organisations with deliveries of books and our Healthy Living Series:

BADAC Young Boys
Ballarat, VIC

Students rich
y can see



ALF POETRY COMPETITION 2023

The ALF Poetry Competition is open to all Indigenous students at the 150 schools participating in our Books to the North program. We were once again so impressed by the quality of the poems we received from students, using poetry to celebrate the many unique and wonderful creatures of the world.

We received poems that rhymed, poems that didn't, acrostic poems and haikus. poems about dogs, cats, pigs, crabs and sacred totems such as the Wargul. We are so grateful to all the students who sent in their poems and hope they will do so again next year.

Our judging panel consisted of ALF tutors, staff, and students taking part in the ASPIRE Program. We are delighted to announce that the winning poem was awarded to Maningrida Mud Crab, by Jacob Adams from Ludmilla Primary School in Darwin. Runner up was awarded to Winston by Maggie McLean from Murray River Upper State School, north of Townsville.

From everyone here at the Aboriginal Literacy Foundations, congratulations to both Jacob, Maggie, and their schools.

FIRST PRIZE

MANINGRIDA MUD CRAB

Maningrida mud crab
Crawling in the mangroves
Claws move to the front
Resting in the mud.

Clomp, clomp, clomp
Squish, squish, squish
Scared of the hunter
Hiding in my hole

BANG!
Stab the ground
The stick is searching for the crab
In the deep, dark, dirty mud

Grab the legs
Black, grey and dirty.

The fire is dancing for the crab
Tastes better smoked
Salty sea on my lips
Feeling full and happy.

By Jacob Adams
Age: 11
Ludmilla Primary School



WINSTON

Once there was a crazy dog called Winston
Who could chew anything and everything up.
He's a blue Australian cattle dog
He joined us when he was just a pup.

Winston is blue and very loveable
He is very scratch-able and cuddle-able.
He looked like Bluey when he was a pup
If you look at photos, he had a glow-up.

Winston always loves when we play fetch
It's so cute when his jaw has a stretch.
He loves his treats he always begs for more
Then he always makes us go to the store.

I love my dog and there's many reasons why
First of all he gives me puppy dog eyes.
He's a smart dog he's good with 'most' of my friends.
I will always love him to the very end.

By Maggie McLean
Age: 9
Murray River Upper State School

RUNNER UP

VALE HEATHER THOMAS

It is with great sadness that I write of the passing of Heather Thomas. Heather had worked with the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation and its predecessor ATAS (the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme) for nearly thirty years. Not only was Heather well regarded by the Aboriginal community, she also had wonderful skills which she brought to the ALF. It is not generally known that Heather for nearly twenty years handled our financial situation, prepared our finances for our annual audit (vital to every charity) and every three months organised our BAS statement. In the case of a charity, this is a quite complex operation requiring a full receipt or verification of every financial transaction.

Heather was perfectly comfortable dealing with Commonwealth and State Ministers on the phone or writing strongly worded letters to insurance companies not supporting our Aboriginal students who were in trouble. On many occasions, she acted as a character reference for students who were in the Justice system or the Magistrates Court and on almost every occasion, there was a positive outcome.

The loss will most particularly be felt by our CEO Tony Cree for whom she acted as a Assistant for the past ten years. She was so familiar with his style of writing that she was usually able to write a letter for almost any purpose that he would merely read, sign and send off. She had advanced computer skills (which Tony Cree is not known for) and was able to undertake many IT assignments that were of great benefit to the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation.

We will remember Heather's contribution by naming one of our new scholarships for Aboriginal Students after her. Although she did not have the benefit of a full education, she had educated herself to a high level and she ensured that her son, Adam and grandson, Riley had the full education that she had lacked growing up in regional Victoria.

Vale Heather, you'll be greatly missed.



THE FELTON BEQUEST ABORIGINAL RESEARCH LIBRARY

Through the wonderful generosity of the Alfred Felton Bequest (better known for its gifts of paintings to the National Gallery of Victoria), we are able to base our Aboriginal Research Library at a convenient central location at our new office at Ross House in Flinders Lane, just down from the Melbourne Town Hall. The Library will also provide access to the Aboriginal Digital Literacy Hub which has a further thousand volumes that will be available to the researcher.

Whilst the Library was originally intended for Aboriginal people wishing to research their historic and cultural origins, we

feel that this will also provide a most useful source for historians in general. The Aboriginal culture is rich and deeply interesting. There is also a growing area of knowledge based on First Nations cultures in several continents: it is interesting that many of the characteristics found in Australian Indigenous people, and their encounters with Europeans are mirrored in North America and elsewhere.

We feel this Library will make a big contribution and are grateful to both the Alfred Felton Bequest and the Ross House Association.



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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