

# IAN THORPE'S Fountain for youth



*Cleven at Urapunga School, Northern Territory*

**LITERACY EMPOWERMENT PROJECT - PROGRESS JUNE**  
**2009**

## **THE BIG PICTURE**

IAN THORPE'S FOUNTAIN FOR YOUTH is now contributing to early learning, literacy development, community storytelling, digital skilling and cultural education for more than 2200 Aboriginal children attending 20 schools in 20 different remote communities.

In the Northern Territory these communities are Amanbidji, Barunga, Bulla, Bulman, Jilkminggan, Maningrida, Mataranka, Manyallaluk, Minyerri and Kewuyli Camp, Ngukurr, Pine Creek, Pigeon Hole, Timber Creek, Urapunga, Yarralin and Wugularr. In addition we have contributed to a literacy project in Kalkaringi and the Literacy Backpack is expected to be introduced there soon as well as at Lajamanu.

In Western Australia's Kimberley region an early learning project has successfully been introduced at Bidyadanga along with the Literacy Backpack at La Grange School.

With funds raised from public and corporate donations we have extended the Literacy backpack project and early learning into the Lockhart River community school on Cape York, Queensland. St Michael's Catholic School on Palm Island is also starting the Literacy backpack project supported by our public fundraising.



***Children choose the stories they will own***



***Mothers at Minyerri NT choose books for their Pre-schoolers***

## **1. EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM**

At Bidadanga in the Kimberley region of WA we have made a very impressive start on an early learning program for 0-3 year olds supported by La Grange School.

By funding a teacher, Jenny O'Neill and an Education Assistant, Gina Kitchener, we believe we have a model that can work with infants and at the same time improve parent's understanding of education and participation in their children's learning.

The teachers are delighted that such young children are showing engagement and demonstrating that they can gain the skills that will allow them to make a successful start at school in 2010. The 0-3 program runs on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday mornings from 8.00am to 12.00 noon.

In the Northern Territory, an early learning project officer employed by the Sunrise Health Service Aboriginal Corporation and funded by our project supervises four Aboriginal mothers in four separate remote communities, Wugularr, Manyallaluk, Barunga and Minyerri.

At Lockhart River in far north Queensland, Aboriginal mothers alone supervise their infants in a playgroup using early learning books and other learning resources we have provided through independent fundraising.

While any support for mothers 'as first teachers' is helpful in preparing children for school, by comparison, investing in a skilled teacher, even part time, with the support of a skilled Aboriginal Education Assistant, is a far more promising way of developing these children's social and educational skills.

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## **2. LITERACY BACKPACK PROGRAM**

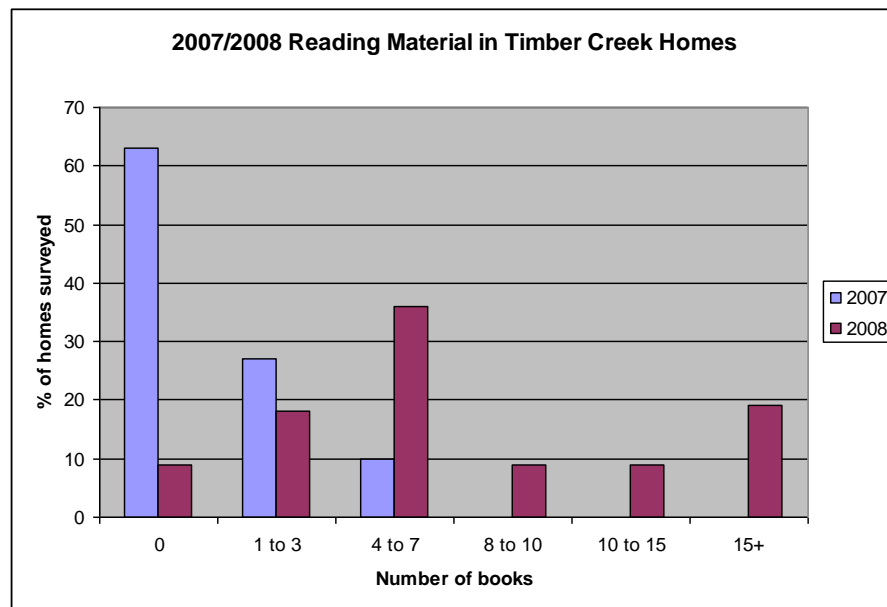


Literacy Backpacks provisioned with books, magazines and newspapers have been supplied to approximately 2,170 children in the 20 remote Aboriginal communities listed above. Because this approach is aimed at the whole family, parents and student siblings have also benefited from access to interesting reading material. This is helping 2170 homes develop greater interest in reading and storytelling.

The enthusiasm of students, parents, teachers and principals has spread great interest in the Literacy Backpacks. Over the past six months we have outlined the strategy to remote area education conferences at Weipa on Cape York, also in Brisbane, Sydney, Darwin and at the Montessori National Education Conference. At a recent Katherine Group Schools Teaching Principals' Conference a survey of Teaching Principals gauged their perspective on the success of the Literacy Empowerment project in their communities.

The feedback was extremely positive and principals report the following outcomes:

- The 2 x \$30 **Scholastic Book Club orders** are always enthusiastically received by students.
- Teachers have noticed an increase in student interest, better concentration and quiet reading in the classroom.
- Teachers are seeing more pride and an improvement in the care students are taking of their books.
- In what were previously bookless homes, many students are regularly reading at home, often with their families.
- Surveys in some communities indicate promising increases in reading material in homes.



- **Books for Reward** which are handed out at end of year celebrations are a definite success. Teachers indicated that this incentive boosts attendance and commitment to achieve. Students feel a great sense of pride receiving the books in front of the whole community.
- The distribution of weekly **newspapers and magazines** to communities through the Literacy Empowerment project is highly regarded. Indigenous support-staff look forward to receiving these contemporary reading packages and sharing them around the community. In some of our schools the mags are taken in the school bus and handed out to the children as they leave the bus for home. Teachers maintain that when children see adult family members reading interesting, appropriate magazines, newspapers and books at home it continues to be a positive encouragement to their reading.
- The literacy of the entire family is being stimulated.
- To assist teachers in facilitating Library borrowing with the Literacy Backpacks, KGS is encouraging each school to appoint senior students to become Library Monitors. These students will be trained in the use of the Agama Scanning program and will also be responsible for encouraging students to look after the library books at home so they can bring them back to school in good condition.



***This will be my book***

- La Grange Remote Community School, Kimberley region, WA, is currently in the third year of the Literacy backpack program for 120 primary school students and 53 secondary students. Here the program emphasises the school's priority of 'reading for understanding'. Children and their families are encouraged to read for enjoyment.
  - La Grange introduced parent workshops as part of the Literacy Empowerment program. After purchasing additional children's books teachers made up activity kits and distributed these to parents attending the workshops to support the discussion of books at home.
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### **3. COMMUNITY STORYTELLING PROGRAM**

Under the Literacy Empowerment project leading children's author, Liz Thompson, is continuing to work with Aboriginal students in remote communities developing books and digital stories about their own life, culture and community.

In June 2009 Year 9 & 10 students at La Grange Community School at Bidyadanga, Western Australia, were taught how to use cameras and audio recorders to upload their digital community stories. In this project Blogs are built for each school and then new online communities allow students at different schools to discuss their lives and work. Curricular work units have been developed and this creative learning enhances other aspects of student engagement with their syllabus.

At Bidyadanga Liz Thompson also is developing a 'Big Book' story with younger children in Years 5 and 6. The children will contribute the art work and take pictures as they accompany elders on excursions. Following the great success of the first six community stories in Series 1, Series 2 will be ready for publication in 2010.

In late July 2009 the Community Stories project continues at Wugularr and Jilkminggan NT. Newly arrived teachers will be trained for the digital storytelling and new students will be added to the groups who took part in the first program.



**Student recording the stories of his elders**

The Community Storytelling program is giving voice to culturally rich communities, developing contemporary stories in book and on-line digital form. This puts Aboriginal students 'in the story' and allows them to join in a 'connected classroom' sharing with other students in the broader Australian community.

**EXPENDTURE ON COMMUNITY STORYTELLING:**

**Digital Storytelling** – new workshop program in the Bidyadanga Community in WA and follow-on workshops in Wugularr and Jilkminggan in the NT. Purchase of equipment, laptops, software, audio visual recorders, still cameras, pelican cases, batteries, funding of the trainers and community facilitators, travel and accommodation costs.



Using our publicly raised funds, Ian Thorpe's Fountain for Youth has published the children's history book, FROM LITTLE THINGS BIG THINGS GROW. The Aboriginal students of Kalkaringi Community School drew the pictures for this story of Vincent Lingiari's land rights struggle.

Using the lyrics of the popular song written by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody and a Gurindji language version has created a best selling children's book and a highly engaging classroom resource for all Australian students. We are following up with a short series of similar historical stories developed in a partnership between Aboriginal communities and other

writers. Proceeds from this project will be directed towards additional art and cultural education in each remote community.



**4. CHILDREN'S CULTURAL SUPPORT PROGRAM**

The Walking with Spirits Festival, created as a Jawoyn cultural project to educate children and unite generations, is adding new forms of teaching and learning for Aboriginal students in communities surrounding Beswick Falls, 120 kilometres south of Katherine NT.

The festival this year is training young dancers, songmen, film-makers, percussionists and shadow-play puppeteers.

Workshops are being held at the Cultural Centre in Wugularr/Beswick to arrange music and build drums for the children's performances. A leading choreographer is helping teach dance. At the local school, children are being introduced to storytelling and theatrical techniques including the use of sound, light and fire. International visitors have marvelled at the brilliant displays each year.

With a film unit and excellent direction from actor. Tom Lewis and Djilpin Arts, the young people also are taught how to produce video and audio stories about their elders and traditions. Some of these new works are screened at the festival.

Jawoyn students are given art training to contribute to the small enterprise established in the Ghunmarn Cultural Centre at Wugularr.

The Walking with Spirits festival is alcohol free and in its stunning natural setting it produces harmony and cooperation between far flung communities. Other communities are invited to contribute to the performances. The emphasis is on family, cultural pride and healthy living.

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**Public/Corporate Funding received  
December 2008 – June 2009:**

Funds have been received from the Bestest Foundation, the public and corporate sector for the continued work in improving health & education of the children, for the Literacy Backpack Program and other linked Fountain for youth projects.

**TOTAL: \$113,000**

**From Little Things Big Things Grow  
– proceeds from the sale of the**

**books:** We have so far raised \$59,000 from "From Little Things Big Things Grow" project and these funds are to be directed to art and cultural education in the Kalkaringi Community and School.

**TOTAL: \$58,000**



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