

**Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth
Report on the Literacy Empowerment Project 2005 – 2007**



Introduction

Since its creation in 2001 Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth has championed new ways of improving the health, education and skills training of young Australians.

The Literacy Empowerment Project, supported by an Australian Government grant of \$1 million in October 2005 has greatly assisted us in building a highly effective alliance of Indigenous families, teachers and health workers.

They are linked by a strategy combining early learning, support for literacy and pride in Culture, as well as specific life-skills training to develop a path out of the maze of poverty, poor health and welfare dependency.

When Ian Thorpe's Fountain for Youth began work in the remote communities east of Katherine, in the Northern Territory, an illuminating study by Schwab and Sutherland of the ANU established that Literacy Backpacks and support for early learning were highly desirable priority programs to improve the 93% illiteracy rate in this region.

In Arnhem Land the median age of death of Aboriginal men had plunged to around 46 years. This is far worse than the national average life expectancy gap of seventeen years. Our partnership with the Sunrise Health Service Aboriginal Corporation and teachers of the Northern Territory Department of Education recognises that the first step to reduce the cluster of preventable chronic illnesses decimating Indigenous communities is to rapidly improve life skills through early learning. In these communities literacy can mean life.

According to global assessments of Indigenous health by Canadian, Dr Fraser Mustard and others, as well as Professor Ken Wyatt's studies of Australia's Indigenous health disaster, raising the literacy of a community of young girls by even one additional year can add as much as four years to the life expectancy of their first children. A single extra year of learning can also reduce by 7-10% the risk of infant mortality.

Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth is providing support for over 1,500 Aboriginal students of school age and up to 300 infants.

This report assesses the Literacy Empowerment Project from 2005-2007 and seeks new funding in 2008 from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Contents and Project Outline

1. Early Learning for infants & pre-schoolers
2. Life-skills and healthy living for children
3. Literacy Backpacks for students & families
4. Audio-Visual learning aids
5. Community Story programs
6. Children's art, music and cultural support
7. Corporate & public support
8. Associated programs & stepping stones
9. Future Goals

1. Early Learning

The Literacy Empowerment Project is helping Aboriginal infants (0-5) make a stronger start. We do this by putting the right early learning materials in the hands of their young mothers.

In 2003 Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth began supplying early learning toys and infant readers to about 200 infants in four Jawoyn remote communities to the east of Katherine in the Northern Territory.

Wugularr, Manyallaluk/Eva Valley, Barunga, Minyerri/ (and Kewuyli camp) received the first early learning support.

A partnership was established with the outstanding team of the Sunrise Health Service Aboriginal Corporation based in Katherine. This regional health service provides care to about 3,500 people in nine remote communities and outstations.

The federal grant has allowed Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth to fund a full time Early Learning Project Officer as part of the Sunrise Health team.

Initially Ms Kate King supervised the construction of shelving in women's centres with early learning materials then stored in plastic boxes at the women's centres. Memory and matching games, construction puzzles, motor skills equipment, arts, crafts and music helped stimulate early learning and prepare infants 0-5 for a better start at school.

Attempts over several years to operate a mobile playgroup in communities hundreds of kilometres apart and subjected to frequent road blockages in the wet season, led to a re-think.

By appointing Ms Lorraine Bennett as Early Learning Project Officer on a two year contract, this highly skilled Aboriginal educator living with her family in Wugularr/Beswick, has been able to recruit and train other suitable Aboriginal women in the remote communities to help organise the early learning for infants.

With skilled staff in short supply and the Sunrise team already labouring under a massive workload, the CEO, Irene Fisher, recommends this approach of employing one well-educated Aboriginal coordinator and four community-based women for the four small communities.

Lorraine Bennett's success in liaising with other Aboriginal families in different communities is proof that on the front lines of the Australian Government's education revolution we need more of the most experienced and well paid educators. Her annual salary covers a contribution to Sunrise Health for the transportation and office support they provide. The Early Learning Project officer is equipped with a lap-top computer and camera but otherwise utilizes the resources of the medical service.



Under Ms Bennett's supervision Aboriginal Community Workers on a modest annual salary have been employed in Wugularr, Manyallaluk/Eva Valley, Bulman and Weemol.

It is hoped that a 2008 grant from the Australian Government would allow us to follow this pattern, appointing another Aboriginal coordinator working with Sunrise Health and four more local community women to tackle early learning for infants in another cluster of these remote settlements. These would be Mataranka, Jilkminggan, Minyerri and Ngukurr.

The Sunrise Health team estimates that there are more than 500 resident infants (0-5) in the nine remote communities and outstations in their service area. Another 50 or more infants are temporarily in these communities because of frequent movement of their families.

The Literacy Empowerment program also enrolls the Aboriginal infants in the Wombat Book Club. By involving the young mothers this has built greater interest in reading to their children.

Our early learning book range covers colour, sound, shape, food, clothes, animals, family, home, Culture, life-skills, transport and school as subjects. Books are purchased from Scholastic - Wombat, Huggies Book Club, Global Books, Kurrajong Aboriginal Projects, Magabala, Dymocks and Angus & Robertson.



In so many of these remote communities young mothers and their infants have never had pre-school education facilities. We have helped build up resources including floor puzzles, games, sand pit toys, craft supplies, durable blocks and musical instruments for children.

To close the space between the home and school our Sunrise Health Early Learning

Project Officer has also come up with some innovations to encourage mothers to bring their children to the school grounds. Mini trampolines and a small jumping castle moved around different communities have helped create far greater interest in both physical exercise and organised learning.

Ms Bennett has shown that Aboriginal teachers have strong instincts about how to engage Aboriginal families in many types of education.

Aboriginal Education Workers as support for infants and classroom aides are worth their weight in gold and should be included in the new national effort to improve education for all Australian children.

Apart from staff, the greatest challenge to this early learning program in these remote communities is finding suitable rooms as a chronic shortage of housing and other facilities forces most people to live in severe hardship.

2. Life-skill Education for children



To support the Sunrise Health Service program of healthy living for more than 1,300 children in the nine remote communities in their service area, in 2003 Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth began to fund a Child Health Educator.

Irene Fisher, CEO of Sunrise, says that the mobile program helped ensure optimal growth of children, gave advice to reduce the rate of infections and ensure immunisations, provided health education on ears,

skin, nutrition, dental care and safety, and promoted activities to improve the social and emotional well being of severely disadvantaged children.

The Sunrise Health Service continues to try to improve the life skills of young Aboriginal people in these nine remote communities. But existing staff are overwhelmed by the demands. After several years of hard work this health educator position turned over and it has not been possible to find a skilled replacement. Despite interviewing six applicants the Sunrise Health team has not been able to employ a suitable Child Health Educator since 2006.

Irene Fisher says that tackling life-skill education in the younger years can help reduce the illnesses that become major learning disabilities for children and the pattern of life threatening chronic illness.

Improving aural health in Aboriginal infants can reduce the middle ear infections and serious hearing impediment still estimated to affect 80% of children in Arnhem Land. Our experience in these remote communities indicates that even a school-based education program for hand and face washing could help reduce the world's highest rates of acute rheumatic heart fever, exacerbated by the connection between skin sores (pyoderma) and untreated streptococcal infections.

Yet there has been reluctance by State and Territory Education Departments to develop effective life-skills and health education for Aboriginal children. It is in the syllabus but rarely happens. Principals and teachers generally are overwhelmed by the extraordinary social challenges.

The frequent deaths, including numerous suicides, in remote Aboriginal communities means schools are constantly closing for weeks on end during funerals and extended mourning.

Some of our most valued Aboriginal staff have lost beloved family members to chronic illness, trauma, violence and suicide. Often families are too poor to pay for funerals.

There is virtually no expert level counselling available for Aboriginal children or their parents in these remote communities in Arnhem Land.

In refashioning the Northern Territory Government Intervention we would urge the new Australian Government to recruit experienced counsellors who can deal with this

trauma and helped build resilience through a preventative program of building up life-skills.

Employing Aboriginal men as teaching assistants can provide greater strength and confidence. After a long era of being humiliated and condemned as violent, drunken and incapable of being able to care for their families, far more Aboriginal men need to be consulted and directly employed in government programs.

Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth strongly supports the research findings by Dr Chris Sarra and his Indigenous Education Leadership Institute that Principals and teachers need training to a higher level to effectively teach and counsel Indigenous children in the most distressed communities.

Our recommendation, supported by the Sunrise Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, is that counselling and life-skills education can best be delivered through school-based programs that are in touch daily with Aboriginal children.



At Manyallaluk NT, Regan Gellar finds family members in a book

3. Literacy Backpacks

To promote reading at home and at school Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth has provided Literacy Backpacks and a regular supply of books, magazines and newspapers to 1,898 Aboriginal children and their families.

| Northern Territory Schools: | Number of Students: |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Wugularr/Beswick | 102 |
| Barunga | 65 |
| Manyallaluk/Eva Valley | 28 |
| Minyerri | 180 |
| Bulman | 75 |
| Jilkminggan | 100 |
| Urapunga | 40 |
| Yarralin | 84 |
| Pine Creek | 52 |
| Timber Creek | 88 |
| Pigeon Hole | 34 |
| Amanbidji (2008) | 12 |
| Mataranka (2008) | (41) |
| Bulla (2008) | (22) |
| Ngukurr (2008) | (295) |
| Maningrida | 322 |
| Early Learning Backpacks NT | 120 |



Associated Literacy Backpack Programs with Corporate Support

| Western Australia: | Number of Students: |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| La Grange School, Bidyadanga | 130 |
| La Grange School (2008) | 40 |

(funded by our partners Vodafone, Bestest and Kessler)

| Queensland: | Number of Students: |
|--|----------------------------|
| Lockhart River "Kuunchi Kakana Program" | 50 |

The Strategy

Inspired by the Navajo Backpacks that we have seen contribute to improvements in literacy among American First Nations, Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth has worked hard since 2003 to build a new alliance committed to tackling the 93% illiteracy in the remote communities of south-eastern Arnhem Land.

A survey by Katherine Group Schools established that most of these remote communities had virtually bookless homes, no public libraries or shops selling reading material. School attendance and parental interest in reading was well below national averages. In some communities, learning was viewed as "a gubba thing" or of little benefit to children unless you were white.

The Literacy Backpack Project began by supplying each student attending school with a strong backpack.



In the fourteen NT remote communities the Literacy Backpacks are stamped with the slogan, "READ ME" focussing the children on the importance of the program. Some communities ask for Backpacks in the red, black and yellow colours of the Aboriginal flag.

Teachers and their highly valued Aboriginal assistants employ Scaffolding or Accelerated Literacy methods to help students choose appropriate books, master the reading level and then move on to a wider variety of reading material.

Students make regular selections of books from an enriched school library. They also take home in their Backpacks early readers for younger brothers and sisters and newspapers and magazines for older members of the family.

Although reading levels are very low in these remote communities one of the biggest surprises for teachers was seeing the enthusiasm of parents for women's magazines, Aboriginal newspapers including the Koori Mail and National Indigenous Times and sporting magazines. Reading material has rarely been available in community Stores and it has greatly benefited students to see their parents reading.

The Northern Territory Education Department, the Katherine Group Schools Principal, Stuart Dwyer and fifteen separate Principals and their teachers have cooperated on this program in a great spirit.

Katherine Group Schools supported us by appointing and funding a supervisor for the Literacy Backpack Project, first Mr Alf Murray and then Ms Cath Meng.

Ms Gail Dous of the NT Library Association assisted schools to establish a simple lending system using a lap top computer to track books moving to and from Aboriginal homes. This has helped establish the habit of taking good care of books in communities that have never had public libraries.

In some communities, such as Bidyadanga in Western Australia, we are now enlisting corporate support to help create public libraries. Establishing good internet access for young people and adults in community reading rooms is another vital step in improving literacy.

The Katherine Group Schools Principal reports that the Literacy Backpack Project has transformed meagre school libraries into a far more valuable community resource.

Reading Resources

Books, magazines and newspapers for the Literacy Backpacks are ordered by individual schools via the Katherine Group Schools central office to obtain bulk discounts and efficient storage and delivery.

It is estimated that provisioning a Literacy Backpack over the course of a year costs about \$200.

The book selection includes Early Readers, Picture Books, Large Format Books, High Interest Titles, Biographies, Aboriginal Culture and History, Health, Science, Space, Human Body, Seasons, Environment and Earth Science, Hunting, Sport, Nutrition, Food & Bush Tucker, Music, Dance, Arts & Crafts, the Indij Reader Series, Maths Support, Dictionaries and Atlases and the helpful student and teacher resource books.

We must point out that many Australian efforts to promote reading in Indigenous homes collect second-hand books that are not matched to the reading levels of remote communities.

Feedback from Aboriginal students, parents and teachers reinforces research indicating that children who have never had access to good reading material take far greater delight and make more rapid progress when they get to read and ultimately own new books.



To enrich the school library resource for the Literacy backpacks we have expanded the range of books by accessing many companies including Magabala Books, Black Ink Press, Julius, Big Blue Marble, Australian Standing, Great Expectations, Angus & Robertson, Dymocks, Scholastic Australia, Indij readers, ACER, Books Direct, Oxford Uni Press, OTR Net, Education Alive, Wooldridges, Burrows Education, IT Beyond, Modern teaching Aids, S & M Publishing, Education Experience, Peg Williams Books, Of Primary Importance, Edumax, Elizabeth Richards, Clark Francis, Edu-21, Kangaroo Trading and Blake Education.

Local newspapers, Aboriginal newspapers and magazines including VIBE, National Geographic, Australian Geographic, Diabetes Australia, Table and various teenage magazines are shared around a large number of Aboriginal homes via the Literacy Backpacks.



‘Students who make good progress and keep up attendance are rewarded with book vouchers that can be redeemed at the Katherine Book Shop’



Teaching Assistant Sue Farrell presenting Regan with an Award for 96% School Attendance and Good Work

Rewards & Progress

Each term every Aboriginal student is allowed to choose a book from the Scholastic Book Club catalogue to take home and keep.

Students who make good progress and keep up attendance are rewarded with book vouchers that can be redeemed at the Katherine Book Shop. This small business, owned and operated by Ms Keryn Taylor, has given generous support to the Literacy Backpack Program by helping arrange book fairs in the remote communities and transporting a variety of books for sale many hundreds of kilometres in a four wheel drive vehicle.

The Australian public and many leading corporations including Vodafone, Credit Suisse Australia, and Kessler Limited have given considerable support for the Literacy Backpack Project after seeing the direct benefits to Aboriginal children.

The direct contact with remote area Aboriginal families will in time open up new opportunities, stepping stones discussed later in this report.

The strongest evidence of progress supported by the Literacy Backpack Project is the steady improvement in reading skills demonstrated to us by Aboriginal students on our visits, including some with senior federal and state ministers.

Children we have got to know well over the past six years have gained in confidence and in 2007 some made a long journey to Darwin or Cairns to start high-school.

There is no doubt in the minds of educators, students and parents that the Literacy Backpacks are stunningly successful.

Literacy Backpack Assessment

The Katherine Group Schools central office, combining reports from all of the remote communities participating in this region, provides the following assessment of the first phase of the Literacy Backpack Project, 2005-2007:

“Students show great excitement at the opportunity to regularly choose library books to take home, exposing them to the joy of sharing their stories with family members.

Also strikingly evident in our students is the joy expressed when presented with their Scholastic book orders. It’s refreshing to see the expressions of anticipation and excitement on their faces, emotions once only reserved for toys and sports equipment. The issue of these Scholastic orders together with a selection of newspapers and magazines of choice circulated throughout communities by schools each week, has nurtured a culture of reading that is spreading in community homes.

Parents and Community members are slowly showing an increase in appreciation of literature through their support at school Book Fairs throughout the year. Schools participating in the project now give books as prizes for attendance/high achievement. In addition to these prizes a selection of books covering a range of age groups and reading levels are brought out to schools from Katherine Books for students to choose in exchange for Book vouchers also awarded for improvement or extra effort in reading and writing. Parents are invited to attend award ceremonies and to purchase books for their children and themselves from the selection provided.

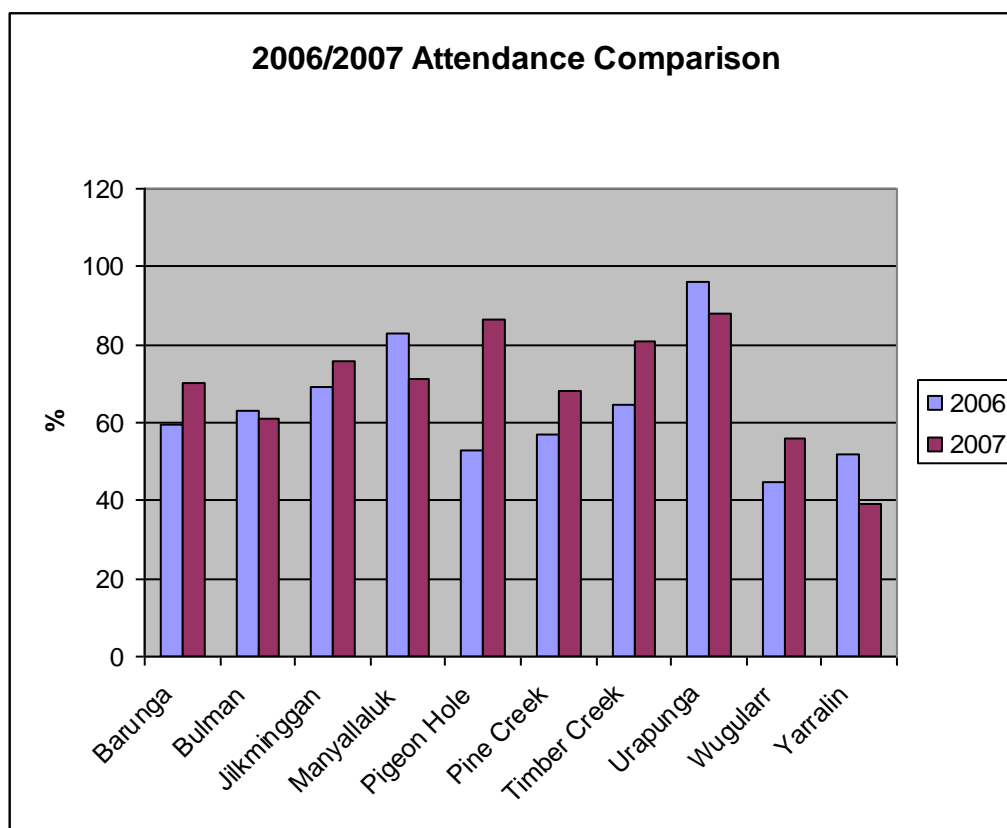
Where possible, these occasions are scheduled to coincide with major school/community celebrations where students showcase their class activities and achievements in literacy and numeracy to their parents and community members. These are joyous celebrations that play a major role in helping to bridge the gap between home and school.

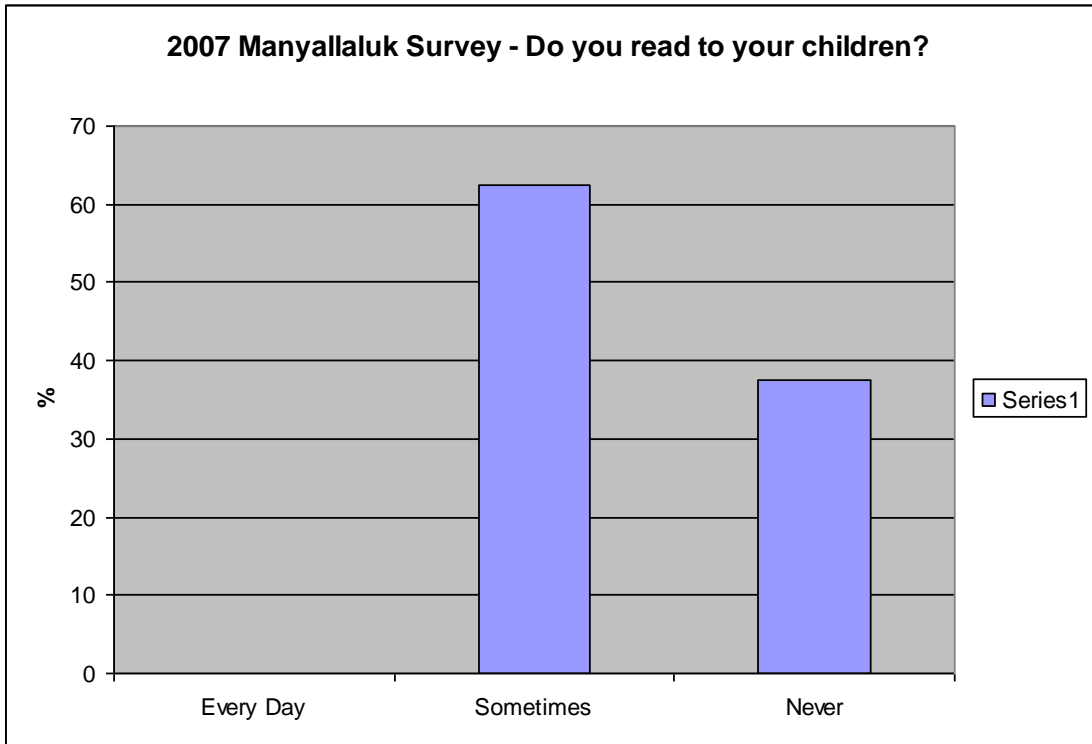
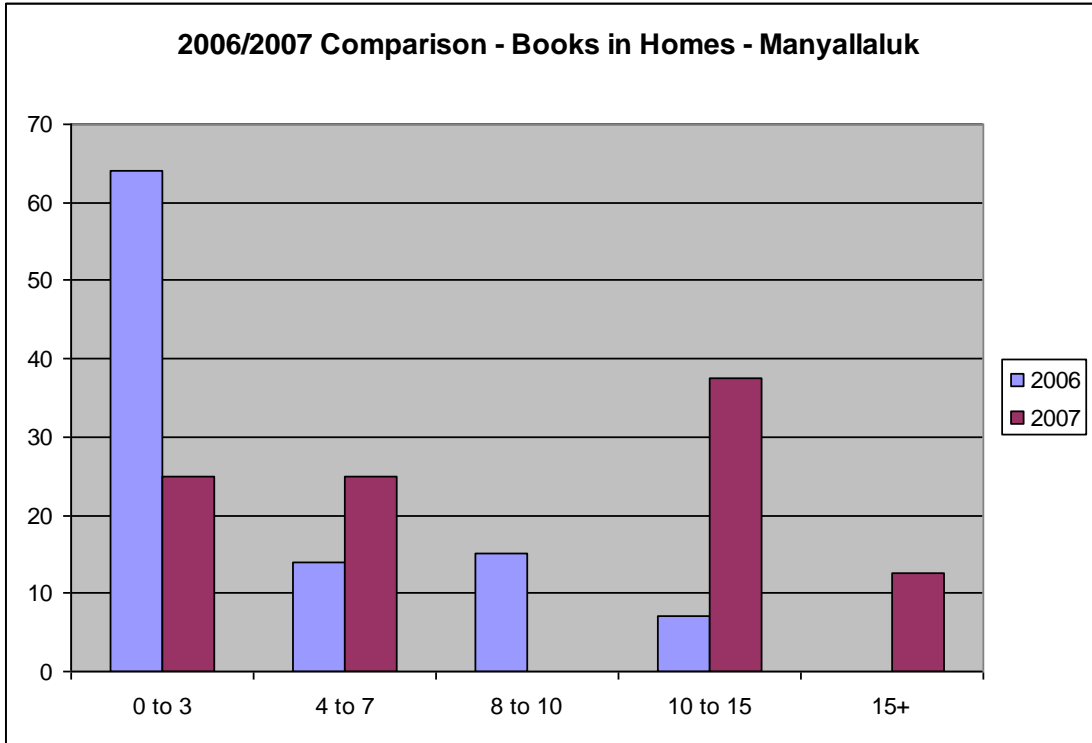
2006/2007 comparisons below show the following outcomes:

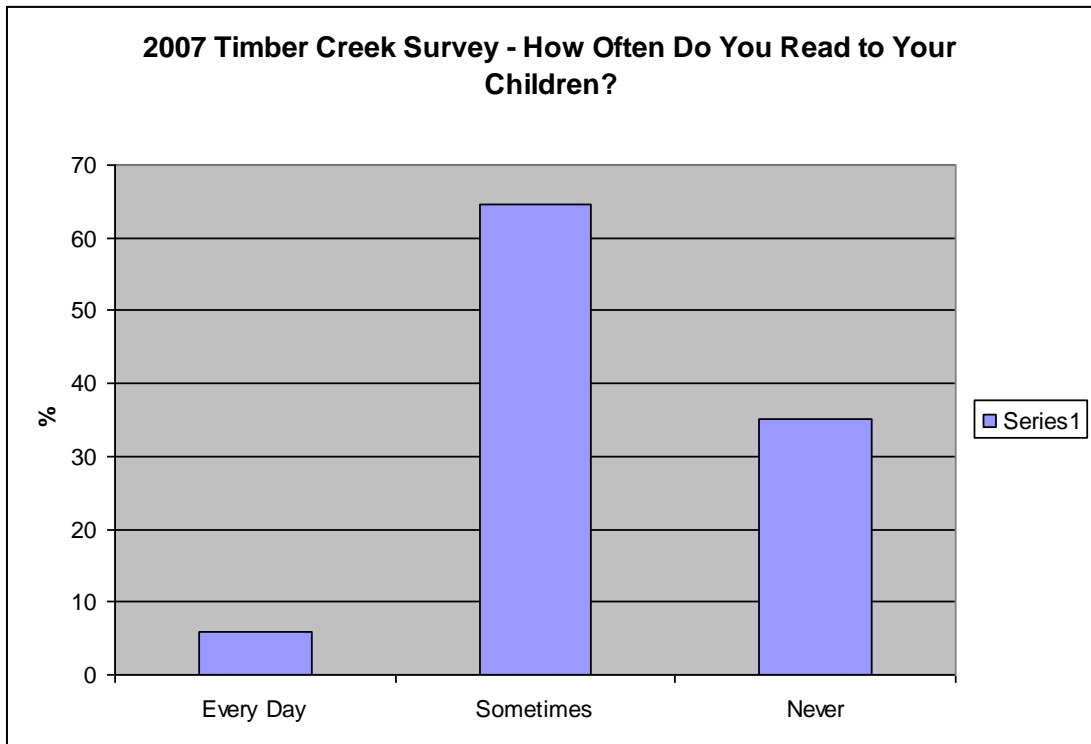
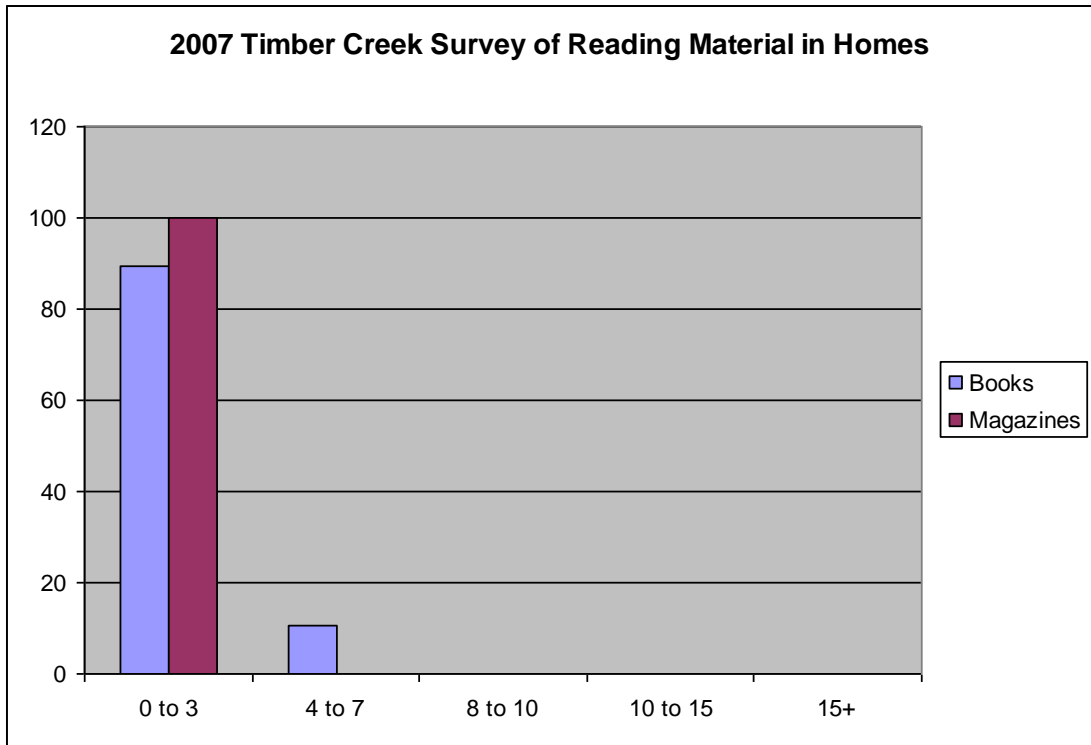
- Attendance figures have increased in 7 out of the 10 participating schools in Katherine Group School
- In the communities surveyed, the number of Books in Homes have also shown increases between 2006 and 2007
- Of the schools surveyed, responses indicated that parents do occasionally read to their children

Those schools that have joined the project this year will be surveyed again in six monthly intervals to provide comparisons on literature in homes. “

The following Graphs are samples of the data collected and comparisons between the 2006/2007 period:







Please Note: The Literacy Backpack Project has been introduced into this school in 2007. A further survey will be completed in six months time to make comparisons.

4. Audio Visual Learning Aids

Our involvement with many of the leading Indigenous education organisations in Australia gives us considerable experience in establishing how children with low levels of standard literacy learn faster and benefit enormously using audio visual aids.

We observed such progress at some of the nation's most progressive Aboriginal schools, including Kuranda, Queensland and Walgett Catholic Primary School in NSW.

"The use of the electronic white board within the classroom allows the teacher to work in small groups which is important for the many multi-level classrooms found in remote community schools. The teachers are able to resource information and bring the outside world into the classroom, a world that most children in remote communities would not ever get the chance to experience. Most importantly the interactive board allows children to be physically involved in learning, a very important consideration when teaching Indigenous children as they are 'kinetic learners'". Pamela Hepburn, Principal of Maningrida Community Education Centre.

On the urging of Arnhem Land Principals committed to the Literacy Backpack Project we have funded the purchase and installation of Electronic White Boards in seven remote area schools to the east and west of Katherine.

These communities are Jilkminggan, Pine Creek, Timber Creek, Urapunga, Yarralin, Bulla and Mataranka.

The cost of purchase and installation was \$54,204.

In the much larger community of Maningrida where about 2,600 Indigenous people live on the Arafura sea coast we have provided five Electronic White Boards to support literacy and learning for over 470 children. This cost an additional \$31,347.

In our developing relationship with corporate partners such as ANZ and Vodafone we have drawn SOME into supporting this effort to add audio visual learning aids to the Literacy Empowerment Project.



Students at Maningrida School enjoying their lessons using the new 'interactive smart boards'.

5. Community Reading Programs

Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth, represented by Jeff McMullen and Michelle Flaskas, has attended University conferences and literacy forums seeking to promote the ability of Aboriginal people to write their own stories.

A widespread cultural resistance to what is perceived as a European system of learning is magnified by the scarcity of positive writing about contemporary Indigenous life. Changing this is recognized as a most important part of developing literacy in multiple forms.

In the Katherine region we introduced to the schools the leading children's author and illustrator, Liz Thompson who has worked with Jawoyn children at Barunga in developing a book of their stories for publication.

Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth is funding a visit to two of the remote communities in the Katherine region by author, Alison Lester. This project costing \$8000 is expected to produce best selling publications by one of Australia's most acclaimed children's authors. The University of Victoria is also providing an extensive Community Stories Program for students and other young writers in Barunga and Wugularr/Beswick. Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth has contributed \$15,000 towards this program.



Teaching Assistant Mavis Jumbiri reading with a student from Manyallaluk School

6. Art, Culture and Music Education



Each year around the end of July, Aboriginal actor, film-maker and musician, Tom Lewis and his community based Djilpin Arts Company join elders in leading children and families in a wonderful celebration of traditional Culture.

The “Walking with Spirits” Festival has been staged since 2004 on the shores of the lake at Malkgulumbu (Beswick Falls) near Wugularr in the Northern Territory.

The performance at sunset in a spectacular waterfall setting is a fusion of traditional and contemporary dance, song, story-telling and music.

An important part of the Literacy Empowerment Project has provided training for the young people to develop traditional dance and music, as well as contemporary skills including data projection, animation, audio recordings, digital video production and editing, 3D theatrical objects using fire and puppetry, lighting effects and drama.

As one of the country’s best known Aboriginal actors, Tom Lewis and his company have enlisted outstanding artistic supporters including the Australian Shakespeare Company to assist in this Art and Cultural Education.

Development of some of these ancient stories has been supported by the ABC and broadcast on the website <www.dustechoes.com>

More international tourists are discovering Walking with Spirits after multiple screenings of one of our documentaries was on the Fox 8 Feature Network.

Walking with Spirits is held in a sacred place but on this special weekend the Traditional Owners invite visitors to picnic or camp out for the corroboree which also attracts Aboriginal dancers and musicians from far off communities.

In a region that has long battled petrol-sniffing by young people and widespread drug and alcohol abuse, the alcohol free festival creates considerable tranquillity.

It is a positive boost to community spirit, essential if we are to see further gains in education and health for these Aboriginal children.



When the 2007 festival was threatened by the death of the oldest Traditional Owner linked to the Beswick Falls sacred site, the musical performance shifted to a private property on the outskirts of Katherine.

Performances will resume at the waterfall in 2008.

While the greatest beauty of Walking with Spirits is undoubtedly the sight of so many Aboriginal children, confident about who they are and of the value of their Cultural heritage, this unique event helps bring white and black Australians together.

Jeff McMullen is patron of the Walking with Spirits festival and works closely with Tom Lewis and his partner, Fleur Parry, to develop the festival's potential while maintaining its unique and original qualities.

Walking with Spirits was featured in 2007 in ABC publications and will be prominent in the 2008 edition of the Sun Herald's tourism feature supplement on "25 Great Places by 25 Great Australians".

7. Corporate and Public Support

Through its leadership Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth has introduced a range of significant Australian corporations to Aboriginal communities where they can help make a difference.

Several other charities have also contributed to the Literacy Empowerment Project and associated programs to improve Indigenous health and education.

1. Vodafone Australia has provided \$200,000 towards the Literacy Backpack Project
2. Bestest for Kids has provided \$200,000 to support the Literacy Backpack Project

3. Kessler Financial Services has provided \$60,000 which helped support the “Kuunchi Kakana Program” – (good start for Babies project) at Lockhart River in Queensland.
4. Credit Suisse Australia donated \$65,000 to help provision Literacy Backpacks.
5. Mortgageport Paul Gow/Peter Lonard Charity Golf Day has raised \$340,000 over the past three years to support a wide range of child health and education projects by Ian Thorpe’s Fountain for youth (2005-2007). The Charity Golf Day has been supporting Fountain for youth for six years and has raised over \$500,000 for the charity during this time.
6. Fouress Foundation (\$20,000) and Becher Foundation (\$15,000) have provided funds to support the Literacy Backpack Project.
7. Fountain for youth has been generously supported by the public receiving over \$300,000 between the 2005 – 2007 period.



Young supporters at the Walking with Spirits Festival

8. Associated Projects and Stepping Stones

Ghunmarn Cultural Centre

After the success of the Walking with Spirits Festival in developing the cultural awareness and artistic skills of Aboriginal children Ian Thorpe’s Fountain for youth joined with Djilpin Arts and Traditional Owners to help build a permanent Art and Cultural Education Centre at Wugularr.

The Ghunmarn Cultural Centre, opened by Ian Thorpe in May 2007, contains a shop front, production rooms for art training, a digital archive and a major gallery.

The Centre was established with \$100,000 of funding publicly raised by Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth and \$36,609 provided by Credit Suisse Australia for further training programs.

The project paid real wages to local Aboriginal men to renovate a disused building known as the 'Red Barn'.

A permanent, air-conditioned gallery space has been created on the upper levels to showcase an extraordinary art collection left by the late Arnhem Land painter, David Blanassi and others.



This gives the Wugularr/Beswick Community control of one of their most important Cultural assets which, in time, will attract more visitors to the Cultural Centre.



After further training two employees at the shop now market a variety of fine quality traditional art, weaving and hand crafted musical instruments.

This is the first independent business in Wugular and establishes a very good example, showing how local knowledge when well marketed can benefit the community.

In this way we are trying to link our Literacy Empowerment Project to further opportunities providing these young Australians with stepping stones to meaningful employment.

Wugularr Basketball Complex

To promote exercise and a healthy lifestyle Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth created a partnership to fund construction of a new Basketball Court at Wugularr.

After at least seven major floods had destroyed the old court and damaged many school buildings plans were finalized for a new Wugularr school, due for completion in 2008.

Built on higher ground to reduce the flood risk the school now has a new basketball facility which over time can be covered and utilized as a community hall or even a flood relief centre.

Our \$120,000 project was funded with the following donations:

1. O'Neill Foundation \$30,000
 2. Norm & Sue O'Neill \$10,000
 3. Dave & Kerry Rickards \$10,000
 4. Ian Thorpe & Dave Flaskas \$25,000
 5. Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth \$15,000
 6. Credit Suisse Australia \$13,706
 7. Vodafone staff \$15,750
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Bidyadanga, WA Literacy Backpacks

In Western Australia, Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth was invited by State Aboriginal Education Director, Edie Wright, to launch the Literacy Backpack project in 2007.

The first school chosen was "La Grange" at Bidyadanga, a small Kimberley community south of Broome.

Literacy Backpacks were provided to 130 Aboriginal students with another 40 to follow in 2008.



Our start in Western Australia has been funded by public donations and corporate supporters (Vodafone, Bestest and Kessler)

With new federal funding in 2008 we would hope to introduce an Early Learning Project for infants (0-5) at Bidyadanga. This would follow the pattern of the project in the Northern Territory through the funding of an Early Learning Project Officer and local women to work with young mothers.

Bidyadanga WA Community Library

Following our approach of inviting leading corporations to work directly with Aboriginal communities to help educate and improve the health and future opportunities of children, ANZ staff volunteered to help fund a new Community Library at Bidyadanga, WA.



For over five years this remote community had struggled in vain to secure support to build a library.

Thirty bank staff took part in the ANZ Corporate Charity Challenge and raised \$102,000 to establish the Bidyadanga Community Library in 2007.

This fundraising will cover reading resources for the library for 3 to 5 years.

As a result of this support Western Australia State Libraries has recognised Bidyadanga Community Library as eligible for all of the usual benefits provided to other libraries.

Two local Aboriginal women have completed Library Assistant Training and will work in the Community Library with the Bidyadanga School Librarian.

Lockhart River Qld Early Learning



At Lockhart River in Far North Queensland Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth has contributed to efforts to improve early learning and life-skills for young mothers and their infants.

In 2007 Ms Claudia Whitton and the Lockhart River Aboriginal Shire Council organised an instruction program to train local mothers.

Approximately 60 mothers with 95 children under the age of 5 are still in need of a great deal more support.

To help improve early learning and literacy, 50 Literacy Backpacks were provided to the Kuunchi Kakana Program at Lockhart River.

We have utilized public donations to plant the seeds of these new, small scale programs.

Outback to the Beach

One of Sydney's most famous surfing communities, North Palm Beach, will join with Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth to provide an inaugural life-skills training program from February 13th – 27th, 2008.

The North Palm Beach Surf Club is hosting a dozen young Aboriginal people (six males and six females aged 15-19) selected by the Jawoyn Association from Wugularr, Barunga and Manyallaluk/Eva Valley. They will be supervised by the Surf Club and three Aboriginal Traditional Owners accompanying the young people. Most of the group have never been out of their local region.

This project was proposed by film-maker, Kit Moore, who worked in Barunga and noticed the limited opportunities for further training for young people who have left school. Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth and the Jawoyn Association have been looking for stepping stones to develop the employment skills of this age group.

The North Palm Beach Surf Club is keen to contribute to closer relations with Indigenous people and is planning a reciprocal trip to Jawoyn country around mid-year to give young surf club members the opportunity to learn more about Aboriginal people and how Surf Clubs might do more to lend a hand.

The "Outback to the Beach" training program will focus on developing the skills, confidence and physical fitness of the young people through supervised exercise, water safety training and specific jobs training.

They will be taught valuable skills including emergency first aid that could prove life saving in their remote communities. A Palm Beach marina is training them on small boat operation and maintenance of motors. This will assist them to get work back home in the tourism enterprises on the waterways of Nitmiluk Gorge. Indigenous National Park Rangers discussed will discuss with the group how to use cultural knowledge and bush lore for eco-tourism.

Individuals with particular skills will be given further opportunity for training and networking with leading professionals who may further their employment prospects. Young women working in the Ghunmarn Cultural Centre will be given instruction by a Newport Art Gallery on marketing and developing new products. Two young film makers emerging through the Djilpin Arts program of Art and Cultural training in Wugularr will be mentored by several of Australia's leading cinematographers.

One of the highlights of the fortnight's training program will be motivational visits and participation by Ian Thorpe, Sydney Swans AFL football stars, Adam Goodes and Michael O'Loughlin, as well as the boxing Kelly brothers, will speak to the group about healthy living, overcoming setbacks, and taking pride and value their Culture.

Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth is funding air travel to Sydney and accommodation in Darwin for this life-skills training program. North Palm Beach Surf Club, Taxis Combined and other corporations are contributing generously.

9. Future Goals

Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth has worked hard over the past six years to help inform our nation about the needs of children living in the remote communities.

Our advocacy and championing of the Close the Gaps strategy has been positive and supported by good research to show Australians that Aboriginal communities can overcome their poor health, unemployment and welfare dependency.

By organising and participating in health and education forums around the country we have built support for the Close the Gaps strategy to bring equality in life expectancy for all Australians.

Having demonstrated how much we can achieve with the \$1 million dollars wisely expended from 2005-2007 we ask the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to grant us \$1.5 million in funding in 2008.

Our goals are to maintain and expand the Early Learning and Literacy Backpack projects in Aboriginal communities east and west of Katherine, NT, and in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

We seek to link our programs, supporting healthier and better-educated children from infancy through the school years and on to employment and a much brighter future.

There is potential for us to play a significant leadership role in the new Australian Government's program, revolutionizing education for all Australian children.

We intend to keep on leading by example. This is a life-long commitment.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Thorpe
Director

Jeff McMullen
CEO
PO Box 402

Literacy Empowerment Project 2005 – 2007

- Literacy Backpacks involving Aboriginal parents, providing a bridge to the schools, improving the learning environment
- Early Learning supporting the young mum's and their children
- Cultural Education strengthening future employment opportunities for the children

