Media release

Indigenous Literacy Day 1 September 2010

Making a difference in remote Indigenous communities

Some kids living in the remotest parts of Australia are able to communicate in up to five languages by the time they reach school. Often, however, they will have little to no experience in reading and writing standard Australian English and their literacy levels will be severely disadvantaged right throughout their lives.

On Wednesday 1 September INDIGENOUS LITERACY DAY aims to raise over $400,000 for over 200 remote communities that stretch from Broome to Kununurra, Hermannsburg to the APY lands, and from Cape York to Broken Hill.

Working in partnership with The Fred Hollows Foundation, INDIGENOUS LITERACY DAY is a national event addressing the problems in literacy in remote communities. It provides books, access to literacy materials and in some instances, translations of books into local Indigenous languages (this year over five stories/600 children’s books were translated into Tjuyuru, the local Indigenous language at Warburton in Western Australia).

INDIGENOUS LITERACY DAY is the brainchild of a former teacher and Queensland bookseller Suzy Wilson who, six years ago, became aware that one in five children living in remote communities in the Northern Territory could not read or write at the basic minimal level in standard Australian English.

“Can you imagine what it would be like to go through life not being able to read a medicine bottle, street signs or labels in a supermarket?” Wilson asks.

“Reading opens doors and provides basic opportunities that the majority of kids living in cities have”, she said. “Our project gives kids access to books from the earliest age and help develop their literacy skills in standard Australian English”.

Since it began five years ago, THE INDIGENOUS LITERACY PROJECT has grown from supplying books to three communities near Katherine in the Northern Territory to over 200 communities Australia-wide. Its team of ambassadors travel to remote communities to conduct storytelling workshops with kids as young as six and seven and in the past 12 months, over 35,000 books have gone to over 200 remote communities to schools, preschools and playgroups, outreach centres, women’s groups, and geriatric homes.

David Gaunt, Chair of The Indigenous Literacy Project, said that the supply of books was the first initiative in helping address literacy problems but acknowledges that it is only the first step. “In the past six months we’ve launched an early literacy project called Book Buzz which is aimed to enhance literacy for children right from birth up to the age of five. Book Buzz has been launched in Manyallaluk in Northern Territory, Wilcannia in NSW and will be launched in Warburton in September this year”, he said.

Can we make a difference? On Wednesday 1 September, all Australians are invited to help make a difference. Log onto: www.indigenousliteracyproject.org.au and join the hundreds of schools, libraries, bookshops, publishers and individuals across Australia. Donate by buying a book at a participating bookshop, participating in a fundraising activity or making a donation online”. For more details please go to: www.indigenousliteracyproject.org.au

For interviews and further information please contact:

• Suzy Wilson, Founder on 0418 991845
• David Gaunt, Chair: 0410 615038 or email Karen Williams on 02 95555605/0404075924 or email Karen@indigenousliteracyproject.org.au