ANNUAL REPORT 2013/2014

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Photography Credit:

Photos of the Torres Strait programs were photographed by Sallie-Ann Macklin who is the founder of the MAD Women Network, helping women to be acknowledged for the work that they do that Makes A Difference in the lives of others. Her trip to the Torres Strait in November 2013, was to explore the “ripple” effect that Maria Montessori has had on children’s education and how her methods can be used to promote learning in indigenous children. The photographs taken were to assist her sister, Julia Nelson with her own personal vision and passion of seeing the Montessori method adapted and embraced by the women of the Torres Strait Islands.

Photos of the Ngaantijarra Lands School supplied by Andrea Mahiepala, Early Childhood Education Teacher, Kiwirrkurra Campus.
VISION

OUR MISSION & OBJECTIVES

The Montessori Children’s Foundation (MCF) seeks to make the benefits of Montessori education available to children and communities that would otherwise be unable to access them due to remoteness, poverty or disadvantage.

As a non-profit charitable organisation, MCF’s activities focus on laying the foundations of sustainable education programs that promote the natural development of the human being from birth to maturity, enabling children to build a love of learning and a confidence in themselves as effective learners throughout their lives, in the process developing a passion for and a commitment to making a positive contribution to their families and communities.

MCF’s long-term objectives are to:

• uphold the rights of the child in society and promote the importance of supporting the optimal development of children for the long term benefit of all members of society;
• promote the Montessori approach as a means to achieving peace and social reform;
• raise funds and allocate them to projects that meet defined criteria and support MCF’s long-term objectives;
• alleviate hardship faced by Australian children; and
• provide opportunities wherever possible for children to develop normally.

Abbreviations

AMI Association Montessori Internationale, the coordinating body of Montessori education and projects worldwide
MAF Montessori Australia Foundation, the coordinating body of Montessori education in Australia
MMICT Masterman Montessori Indigenous Children’s Trust
MICT Montessori Indigenous Children’s Trust
MCF Montessori Children’s Foundation
MCFSFT Montessori Children’s Foundation Scholarship Fund Trust

Indigenous and Remote Communities:
MCF supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities to access high quality Montessori education programs. MCF’s role in these projects is to develop genuine community engagement and ownership, support the training of local people, and establish robust systems of quality control.

Scholarships and Tuition Assistance:
MCF is working towards having a dedicated trust fund that offers a range of scholarships and bursaries for children and adults to overcome disadvantage and to access Montessori schools or undertake specialist training.

Assistance to Infancy and Parent Education:
MCF in association with the Montessori Australian Foundation is developing Pregnancy to Parenting Australia as A not-for-profit provider of education programs to support parents, families and communities in their task of nurturing young children.

Montessori Institute and Research Centre:
MCF supports the establishment of an independent research centre, through which training and independent study can work to better validate and promote the benefits of the Montessori approach for the optimal development of the human being.

Public Awareness and Advocacy:
MCF leads efforts to champion the cause of all children through advocacy, by increasing public awareness, and by promoting a greater awareness and understanding of the development of the child and the importance of the first years of life.

Montessori Adolescent Programs:
MCF supports the expansion of Montessori Adolescent Programs in schools across Australia as well as advocating for other programs that apply the Montessori approach for young people aged 12 to 18.
MCF works to champion the cause of all children, to uphold the rights of the child, and to promote the Montessori approach as a means to achieving peace and social reform. MCF is committed to expanding the availability of Montessori services to the least privileged members of society, and, in doing so, remains true to Dr Montessori’s original vision.

In line with Dr Montessori’s vision, MCF is currently focused on working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia. In particular, MCF is working in a number of remote regions, including the Torres Strait, Cape York and Western Australian desert communities, to establish high quality, sustainable early childhood education and parent support programs.
The Torres Strait Nation’s commitment to Montessori education has been maintained since the inception of MCF’s partnership with Tagai State College, the Torres Strait Islanders’ Regional Education Council and YUMI Education in 2008. Work has continued on making the benefits of Montessori early childhood programs available to a greater number of communities, and on building towards sustainability and local control and operation of programmes. As partners, we pursue a vision of Montessori services being available in all Torres Strait communities in the years to come, staffed by skilled Montessori teachers who are also Torres Strait Islanders, and who will become the backbone of an expanding team of professionals dedicated to a bright future for the Torres Strait’s children and therefore the Torres Strait nation.

This means that our commitment to training and mentoring is stronger than ever, a commitment shared by our key partners.

**TORRES STRAIT**

**PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS**

Project Highlights:

**2014-2108 Strategic Plan for Montessori in the Torres Strait**

- The 2014-2108 Strategic Plan for Montessori in the Torres Strait has been ratified by all three partners and is now accompanied by an annual Operational Plan, which guides our planning and shapes our activity, as well as providing a benchmark for reflection and evaluation. The Five Year Strategic Plan represents a significant shift in the partnership to a commitment to the achievement of long-term objectives. A joint strategic and operational planning and review process enables all partners to align resources and activities towards achieving our shared vision.

**Montessori Childcare in the Torres Strait**

- Iama Migi Kaziv Muth is now in its second year of successful operation on Iama (Yam Island) and was joined in the second half of 2014 by a Montessori Childcare Centre on Ngurapai (Horn Island).

- TSIREC was approached by the Torres Shire Council to take over the running of the Ngurapai Childcare Centre and to introduce a Montessori approach to service delivery. The transition of the centre to a Montessori approach has involved reorganizing and refitting the existing centre with Montessori materials, and providing training and mentoring to the Centre’s staff, who will be supported through the transition process by Julia Hilson. All centre staff completed an Assistants Training with AMI trainer Cheryl Ferreira in August 2014.
Assistants Course Thursday Island

- In August, an AMI Montessori Assistants Certificate (Early Childhood) was offered to the Thursday Island community, by Cheryl Ferreira of the Maria Montessori Institute in London. The course was open not only to those interested in working as classroom Assistants in Montessori 0-3 and 3-6 environments or childcare centres, but also to parents and primary caregivers of children from birth to age 6.

- The offer was enthusiastically taken up by 15 participants and provided them with an in-depth understanding of the Montessori approach to education in the early years, including child development, the development of communication, movement and independence, preparing and maintaining a developmentally supportive environment, and skills in observation and planning.

- Participants included staff from the Horn Island Childcare Centre, which at the time the course was held, was in the process of being converted into a Montessori centre, the second of its kind in the Torres Strait.

- Students enjoyed both the opportunity to learn and think deeply about how children develop in the first years of life, and to deepen their understanding of the critical roles key adults play in children’s development, as well as the focus on developing practical activities and materials, such as language cards, that they could use in the classroom, centre or at home.

- Those involved in the Course also had the opportunity to attend Advance the Child, Advance the Nation, the inaugural Summit on Montessori education in the Torres Strait.

- We look forward to seeing many of those who attended working in new Montessori programs in the Torres Strait in years to come, and making up part of a high quality, sustainable, and “home-grown” workforce.
Strait Start Highlights:

- Management and staffing of Strait Start programs has been assumed by Tagai State College enabling closer ties to be made between these programs and the pre-prep and prep classes in each community, and placing day to day responsibility for the programs in the hands of the Head of Campus in each location.
- Professional development for HoCs about Montessori Strait Start programs is now a standard feature of Tagai State College’s support for schools, and ongoing professional development for Strait Start coordinators has remained a high priority as a key part of the quality assurance process.
- Attendance has strengthened across all programs in 2014.
- As a result of the opening of new Strait Start services on Mer (Murray) and Masig (Yorke) Islands 2014, and the conversion of the Horn Island Childcare Centre to a Montessori service, there are now 10 Montessori programs for children in the first years of life operating across the Torres Strait.

Tagai State College Highlights:

- The three Kaziw Mudh classes were again fully subscribed for the 2014 school year.
- MCF and Tagai State College celebrated the graduation of two teachers in the AMI 3-6 Diploma Course.
- A number of Torres Strait Islanders have expressed interest in future Montessori training at both pre-primary and primary levels.
- Tagai State College has committed to the expansion of Montessori 3-6 programs beyond Thursday Island in coming years.
- The college has invited members of the Australian Montessori community to become part of the Tagai Ambassadors program; their role is to assist the school identify and recruit high quality Montessori staff, and to support the College in the provision of quality Montessori relief staff in the event of teacher leave.
The Inaugural Summit on Montessori in the Torres Strait was a ground-breaking event that brought together passionate Montessorians from across the Torres Strait, other parts of Australia and from around the world, and created a unique opportunity to share with and learn from each other.

The idea to hold such an event emerged in conversation between the partner organisations responsible for initiating, growing and supporting Montessori in the Torres Strait, and was conceived both as a celebration of our amazing shared journey which commenced in 2008, and as a marker of the commitment of the Torres Strait to embed the Montessori philosophy as a core part of its strategy to achieve autonomy for the Torres Strait Nation.

After months of collective hard work shared between Tagai State College, TSIREC and MCF, the Summit was opened in fine style by Ned David, Chair of the Torres Strait Islanders Regional Education Council, and Stephanie Savage, Associate Principal of Tagai State College, and Montessori’s staunchest champions in the Torres Strait Nation. Their moving speeches made a huge impact on the audience, describing the struggle over the years by Torres Strait Islanders to be recognised as the rightful owners of their lands, to overcome the legacy of colonisation and to proudly maintain their culture and traditions. Ned David’s exploration of the connections he sees between the aspirations of the Torres Strait Nation for an autonomous future, the critical importance of quality education to the achievement of that vision, and the opportunities Montessori education in particular affords Torres Strait children in developing confidence, independence and an enduring love of learning was inspirational to many, and set the tone for a truly joyous exchange of ideas and energy over the three days.

The culture of the Torres Strait was in fact everywhere present, from the traditional welcome, to the beautiful traditional hand made decorations in and around the Summit venues, and the song, music and dance provided by the children of the Thursday Island community, from the tiniest pre-schoolers to the savvy teenage rappers, confidently and creatively proclaiming their heritage, and demonstrating their ability to live authentically in both the Torres Strait and the wider world.
Its significance, not only for the past, but for the present and the future, was powerfully communicated by Mr Jeff Waia’s opening presentation which explored the strong connections of Torres Strait islanders to the sea, and to the stars, the constellations that guide the people of the Nation through space and time.

Attending the Summit was a diverse audience made up of representatives from all the Torres Strait communities, as well as many from the Australian Montessori community who have built much valued relationships with the Torres Strait over the years. In addition, the reputation and significance of what is emerging in the Torres Strait drew visitors from around the world – the UK, Kenya, France, Timor Leste and the USA were all represented among those who engaged with a series of keynote speeches, presentations of varied aspects of Montessori theory and practice, especially in its Torres Strait form, and extremely popular visits to the Thursday Island Montessori environments.

MCF was especially honoured by the attendance at the Summit of Robyn and Peter Renner who have supported our work in Cape York and the Torres Strait over many years through their Family Foundation, and of Elli Bardas, representing the Fouress Foundation, also an important and consistent supporter of our work in the Torres Strait.

The keynote presentation by Margaret Sims, Professor of Early Childhood Education from the University of New England was especially impressive, placing as it did the Montessori approach to early childhood education in the context of what wide-ranging high quality research now tells us is best practice in fostering development in the first years of life. Professor Sims also stressed that a significant body of research is now available that demonstrates that very young children can and do form strong highly beneficial emotional bonds with a range of adults, and that these ongoing experiences of loving care and interaction with both biological parents and “allo-parents” (key adults other than biological parents who play a consistent caring role in children’s lives) are fundamental to their healthy growth, an important issue for many cultures where responsibility for child-raising can commonly be shared among a number of family members.

The presentation by Lynne Lawrence and Hillary Korir on the partnership between AMI and the Catholic Diocese of Nakuru to develop the Corner of Hope project in an Internally Displaced Persons’ Camp in Kenya was greeted with an enormous outpouring of emotion from all members of the audience, not only because of the joyous nature of the outcomes achieved for the children and their families from a traumatic disruption of their lives, but because the presentation demonstrated the ways in which a shared dream of education for children could and did underpin the transformation of the lives of the adult community also, generating creativity, entrepreneurship, employment, self-reliance and hope.

For the representatives of the Lockhart River community in Cape York, who had come to Thursday Island to see Montessori 0-3 programs in action, to meet and talk to parents, teachers and community members, and who were considering a partnership with MCF, the Corner of Hope presentation was a turning point. Not only were they convinced of the benefits that would accrue to their children, but they were excited about the possibilities for building the involvement of parents and extended family in activities that would not only benefit children, but also perhaps plant the seed of economic development for the community as a whole.
The conference dinner was a magnificent opportunity for all involved to enjoy each others’ company and form new friendships while enjoying a feast of Island cuisine in a stunning setting looking across the waters of the Torres Strait.

The Summit ended on the strongest possible note with a session which enabled all community representatives from across the Torres Strait Islands to consider the future directions of the partnership, to express a strong commitment to seeing the benefits of Montessori education made available to all the Nation’s children, and to be sustained by an equally strong commitment that Torres Strait Islanders undertake the training that will ensure that the future education of Torres Strait children lies in Torres Strait hands.

MCF is sincerely grateful to our esteemed partners for the opportunity to participate in this extraordinary event, and to know that a strong commitment has been made to continue to share and celebrate our partnership and its achievement into the future.
AURUKUN

The bi-annual school holiday program in Aurukun, on the remote west coast of Queensland’s Cape York, was first offered in 2009. Now in its sixth year of operation, it continues to be a highly regarded part of the annual provisions of services for the community’s youngest children.

The program has been strongly supported by the Koolkan Childcare Centre, and despite a change of leadership at the Centre, there is ongoing commitment to the program. This is reflected in the Centre’s successful application for state funding to support the travel involved in bringing qualified Montessori teachers to the community twice a year. The school holiday program is fortunate to have secured the service of additional volunteer teachers for 2014, thus broadening the base of supporters on whom MCF can call, and enabling MCF to consider expanding the number of programs to three per year, inline with a request from the Director of the Koolkan Childcare Centre.

The long-term vision to establish Montessori 0-3 and 3-6 programs in the Centre and to provide Montessori training for members of the local community including assistants and teachers remains in place, subject to the wishes and development proprieties of the community as a whole.

In a recent development, a plan is being considered to have two Aurukun women undertake initial training as part of the Lockhart training program in 2015.

LOCKHART RIVER

In early 2014, MCF was approached by the CEO of the Puuya Foundation in Lockhart River, a remote community on the eastern coast of Cape York. The Puuya Foundation was established in Lockhart River over a decade ago to build community capacity and leadership, and to provide an avenue for the community’s vision for its future development to take shape and find expression.

Representatives from the Foundation developed a conversation with MCF to explore whether the approach to early childhood and parenting support developed in the Torres Strait through the Strait Start program might have application in their location. A visit to the community by MCF’s Government and Community Liaison to share information about the program and MCF’s operations led to a commitment by the Foundation’s leaders to attend the Torres Strait Montessori Summit, and to consider the development of a partnership with MCF to facilitate the establishment of such a program.
The Ngaanyatjarra Lands School (Ngaanyatjarra Lands School) is a multi-campus school spread across the Western Desert in Western Australia. Since 2011, a Montessori approach to pre-school education has been trialed at a small number of Ngaanyatjarra Lands School campuses, and a number of staff members of the School have participated in a range of Montessori professional development activities. The campus at Kiwirrkurra, the most remote community in Australia, has had a program in operation since 2011 which is now well-established and successful in giving the community’s children a strong start in education and development.

In 2013 trial programs were also established at the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School campuses in Blackstone and Jameson. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen family and other circumstances, the teachers operating those programs in Blackstone and Jameson had to leave the communities in mid-2014. Despite this break in implementation, the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School leadership is committed to continuing the provision of Montessori early childhood programs across the campuses when suitable staff are available.

Through the dedication of key school teachers and with the support of MCF, Montessori programs have been offered at the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School since 2011. Together parents, school staff and the wider community have celebrated the success of these programs, observing that their children are notably more independent and demonstrate greater confidence with early literacy and numeracy concepts.

**Project Highlights:**

- MCF representatives visited Blackstone and Jameson to deliver mentoring to teachers in the emerging programs in early 2014.
- MCF facilitated a visit by the school’s Executive Principal and the teacher of the Kiwirrkurra Montessori program to the Torres Strait Montessori Summit to Thursday Island (Torres Strait) which provided an opportunity for classroom observations and immersion in conversations and presentation with a wide range of Montessori practitioners from various parts of Australia and the international community.
- Montessori schools throughout Australia continue to support the growth of Montessori programs in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School with generous donations of materials, classroom furniture and other resources.
Masterman Montessori Indigenous Children’s Trust

MCF’s work across Cape York and the Torres Strait is underpinned by the generous bequest from the estate of Leslie Charles “Bob” Masterman.

The Masterman Montessori Indigenous Children’s Trust was established in 2006 in order to fulfill Bob Masterman’s legacy and realise his conviction that Montessori education was a way forward to improve life opportunities for Indigenous Australians.

As Trustee of MMICT, MCF focuses on developing strategic partnerships with individuals, community groups, private businesses and government agencies to ensure the success and sustainability of projects in communities from Cairns through to the Torres Strait, including in the past year:

- Three 3-6 programs with Tagai State College on Thursday Island
- Six community programs for parents and infants on Thursday Island, Badu, Kubin, Boigu, Erub and Poruma
- A long day care centre on Iama Island
- A school holiday program in Aurukun

Montessori Indigenous Children’s Trust

The MICT receives funding and through MCF supports projects, schools and programs aimed specifically at furthering the education of Australian Indigenous children through the Montessori approach. Many of the activities described in this report have received this support and would not have taken place without MCF or this trust fund.

Montessori Children’s Foundation Scholarship Fund

The purpose of the MCFSF is to further the education of children and adults by providing Montessori scholarships as set out in the trust deed. MCF is at present working to establish a capital fund producing income to support scholarships in a stable and predictable manner.
**FINANCES**

2013/2014 OVERVIEW

The following information presents income and expenditure highlights from the 2013/2014 financial year. Totals were summarised from the consolidated financial statements from: Montessori Children Foundation Limited, the Montessori Indigenous Children’s Trust, the Montessori Children’s Foundation Scholarship Fund and the Masterman Montessori Indigenous Children’s Trust.

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**Operating cost analysis 2011 to 2014**

**Project Expenditure 2013/2014**
Looking ahead, MCF remains committed to its mission to make the benefits of Montessori education available to children and communities who would otherwise be unable to access it.

For 2013/2014, MCF has identified five priority areas and key actions on which to focus its work:

1. **Project sustainability**
   - Increase participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members in Montessori training programs
   - Promote excellence in Montessori practice in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through quality-assured mentoring
   - Continue to work in partnership with MAF in the development of Pregnancy to Parenting Australia
   - Continue to drive long-term strategic planning with partners in the Torres Strait, Western Australia desert country and Cape York
   - Continue to liaise with community representatives in Mapoon, Cairns, Pormpuraaw, Redfern and Armidale to explore future opportunities for projects

2. **Governance**
   - Undertake a review of governance and structural models in concert with other Montessori entities

3. **Financial consolidation**
   - Continue to refine internal budgeting and finance management processes
   - Further develop philanthropic and social venture partnerships
   - Expand cost-recovery service provision arrangements

4. **Strategic communication**
   - Develop a strategic communication strategy
   - Develop a range of educational and promotional materials targeting key existing and potential stakeholders
   - Participate in key conferences and events

5. **Research**
   - Undertake a range of research initiatives within current projects
   - Distribute data from research initiatives to promote the success of the projects