



# MCF Annual Report 2015

# Montessori Children's Foundation

## General Achievements

MCF's goal is to make Montessori programmes available to some of the most vulnerable children in Australia, who, for a multitude of reasons, would not otherwise be able to access them.

We focus on Indigenous children in remote communities. Here the need for quality education and support is intensified by vast distances from the centres of Australian government decision-making, service-delivery and economic activity, and by community histories of invasion, appropriation, abuse and neglect. Despite this, in those same communities we find a strong desire for a better future, and a deep awareness that a community's future lies with its children.

In 2015, we celebrate that we now have Montessori programmes across the Torres Strait, an expansion of our programmes in the Aboriginal community of Aurukun, and the development of a new programme in the Aboriginal community of Lockhart River. In addition, we have maintained our relationship with and support for the multi-campus Ngaanyatjarra Lands School in remote Western Australia.

Like all not-for-profit organisations, we are constrained by the limitations of funding, but such constraints can also have the positive effect of prioritising activities that are likely to deliver high impact outcomes. For MCF, this means early childhood is our core area of business, underpinned by the following key principles:

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### Partnership

Partnering with key organisations in communities drives ownership and commitment, and connects us to the work of other organisations committed to children's wellbeing.

### Sustainability

Remote community programmes are only sustainable if the skills to manage, develop, and deliver them are located within the community. Providing Montessori training, especially in 0-3, and 3-6, and building a foundation of local knowledge and expertise, is one of MCF's two key areas of investment.

### Quality

Quality practice needs time and support, and is usually developed in a workplace where experienced professionals provide support and assistance to those at the beginning of their careers. Such a body of Montessori experience and expertise is not available in remote communities, making mentoring our second key area of investment.

### Flexibility

The complex circumstances of remote communities mean that the taken-for-granted ways of establishing and managing Montessori services and programmes, and providing training and mentoring, are not possible. Flexibility is essential in the design and delivery of training and mentoring, hand in hand with maintaining quality and fidelity of practice.

## Current Projects

### Aurukun

MCF has provided school holiday programmes for younger children in Aurukun for many years. We have been fortunate that some outstanding Montessorians have volunteered during their holidays to bring great experiences to the children of Aurukun, and our gratitude to them is immense. A very welcome consequence is the growing interest in Montessori amongst staff of the Childcare Centre. MCF is now partnering the Centre to support staff as its approach to working with children embraces a Montessori philosophy. The project will include training and intensive mentoring over a significant period of time.

### Lockhart River

Fifteen members of the community completed a Montessori Assistant's Course early in 2015, as part of the transformation of the existing early years centre programme to the Montessori approach. Parents now participate with their children in all activities, and are supported by the staff to understand the developmental goals of the programme and purpose of the activities. A research framework to measure its impact included parent interviews that revealed overwhelmingly positive responses. Many parents described how replicating activities at home is transforming the relationship between children and adults in the family.

### Torres Strait

The 3-6 programmes operating on Thursday Island are now in their seventh year, and continue to attract a significant proportion of families making decisions about early years education for their children. Strait Start programmes for babies, toddlers and pre-

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schoolers, accompanied by a parent or other primary caregiver, continue to expand across the islands; there are now 12 programmes operating over 17 inhabited islands, as well as two Montessori childcare centres.

We are also delighted by the fact that an increasing number of those undertaking Montessori teacher training are seeking to complete their placements in the Torres Strait.

### Desert Communities

The relationship between the remote Ngaanyatjarra Lands School and MCF remains strong. This year's highlight was a visit by Julia Hilson to provide intensive support for the early childhood classroom assistants in the Kiwirrkurra campus. Such visits are invaluable for the children and the school, and add to MCF's knowledge and understanding of how to work effectively in remote and culturally very different environments.



## Challenges and Opportunities

The challenges of working in very remote areas are great but can also trigger creative approaches to delivering services and support. Costs are high, and are felt more strongly when interest rates plunge reducing MCF's income as they have done in recent years. However, effective partnerships create new opportunities for applying our funds to optimal effect.

Staffing our public-school Montessori programmes remains a challenge; but one of the best supports in this area has been from the network of Montessori schools around Australia who assist by promoting MCF programmes and job opportunities. In some cases these schools facilitate their own staff members to fill an urgent short-term vacancy.

We also owe an enormous debt of gratitude to various Montessori schools and community members, and most especially to Melbourne Montessori School, who fund-raise for us, and make donations of all kinds to our programmes in remote areas.

Other opportunities emerge from participating in conferences and meetings focused on early childhood, Indigenous education and related issues. These give us a chance to showcase our work, and to learn from others in related fields, and have stimulated great interest from other participants, with opportunities for future collaboration.

## Future Developments

MCF has a responsibility to consolidate programmes already established and ensure that they become increasingly strong and independent. To this end, 2016 will be a year of consolidating our work in Cape York, the Torres Strait, and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School. At the same time MCF continues to seek opportunities as part of its mission to make the benefits of Montessori education more widely available to socially marginalised children. In 2016, an alternative trading name, the Montessori Community Foundation, has been registered for MCF to expand fundraising activities.



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