We have had a wonderful year with some extraordinary successes. Our Northern Books and Library Project has gone from strength to strength. In 2017, we provided books and library grants to 58 remote Aboriginal Schools in the Northern Territory. In 2018, we have concentrated our efforts on Northern Queensland where we have 42 remote and regional Aboriginal schools who will be benefiting. We have given all our schools access to our Digital Literacy Hub, which includes books and articles of interest to Aboriginal children.

In the near future, the Hub will be developed to have an Aboriginal Language Supplement, that will enable translation to be made into Aboriginal languages. This is important as more than 30,000 Aboriginal children have an Aboriginal tongue as their first language. It is also important because it emphasizes the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation’s commitment to preserving Aboriginal Languages as well as ensuring Aboriginal children have good English skills to complete their education and compete on the job market.

This year we also have had the exciting development of our Literacy and Aboriginal Heritage Art Classes. Our Heritage Tutor, Aboriginal Elder Aunty Janet, has been organising classes on Friday afternoon at our Heritage and Art room in Ballarat. We are planning an exhibition of Aboriginal children’s art in the new year. Aunty Janet is a noted Aboriginal Artist, but as well as painting for herself, she has had many major commissions from schools and other institutions.

In the new year we will be re-opening our Bairnsdale Branch under Adam Cooper. This area, on the Victoria /New South Wales boarder is an important Aboriginal area and this branch will enable after school programs and weekend Literacy camps to be undertaken.

All these wonderful developments have only been possible through the generosity of our supporters and all of us at the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation are most grateful. On behalf of the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation we wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a safe Holiday Season.

Dr Tony Cree
CEO
The Books to the North’s wheels are still turning and have picked up traction along the way. This year we have been able to assist almost 50 schools in Northern Queensland, from the most Northern points of Queensland such as Saibai Island, Moa Island, Thursday Island and Wellesly Islands, to the farthest parts of Northern Queensland such as Coomweal, Normanton, Forsayth and Collinsville (including central parts of Queensland such as Longreach and Isisford). These are just some of the locations where remote and regional schools are receiving assistance with boxes of books and library grant funds from the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation.

It has been so rewarding to work with schools and community groups, who can distribute resources where they are most needed. Once again, we are reminded of the severity of some schools in very remote and regional areas, some having as few as 20, 12 or only just 6 students enrolled in their school.

It is essential in these circumstances that these schools are provided with appropriate reading materials and funds to update and improve their libraries. All children have the right to read, and without this vital skill, a child’s future is dim.

We have been so pleased to see that our Books to the North Program has also supported book borrowing programs in remote communities, where children can share books with family and bring forth discussions about what they’ve learned.

With the successful completion of our Northern Australian Book and Library Project for Queensland, almost five and half thousand students in Northern Queensland will have benefited from the books and library grant funds donated to each school. This means that almost 10,000 children both from Northern Territory and Queensland have been given the opportunity at a brighter future. This would not have been possible without the generous support of our donors.

2019 will see the commencement of our Northern Australian Book and Library Project for Western Australia. We ask that our supporters once again help us to continue its success by donating this holiday season and giving children the gift of literacy and the opportunity to fulfill their potential.
The ALF after school program started nearly 20 years ago at Sturt Coaching College in Ballarat. The Government ATAS Program (Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme) had just closed down and there were students with no teachers and lots of unemployed tutors looking for work. We started with two trained teachers Lisa McGlade and Lyn Kelly (both are still with ALF) we also had about 10 volunteers. The aim was to provide any Aboriginal students in the region with reading difficulties at least one hour a week tutoring.

The program gradually developed to include after school groups in Melbourne, Melton, Bacchus Marsh, Ballarat, and the Hamilton region. As well as the after school programs, all students are encouraged to attend our weekend Aboriginal Literacy Heritage camps which are held 5-6 times a year.

The success of the classes and camps can be judged by better school results and the improved reading (on average 3 reading years on the Schonnell scale). However, the feedback from students and parents is equally important:

(Sally, Year 6) “I love the after school classes, they are great. They help me with my homework and my reading. It makes me confident in class”.

(Paul, Year 7) “Kids used to bag me for my bad reading, now I’m ok, I enjoy school sometimes.”

(Sadie, mother of Peter, Year 4) “Pete was refusing school, now he’s ok, mostly he goes without any trouble”.

(Judith, year 2 teacher, Hamilton area) “Tutoring is really important for these young people, very often the after school teacher is the only person in the family who can help them with their reading difficulties and homework. This is important, without reading skills it is very hard to succeed at school.”

This year, the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation commenced an after-school art class with Aunty Janet Curtain. Studies have shown that a strong emphasis on cultural heritage can be one of the key factors that help increase a child’s interest and engagement in their education.

Janet’s classes follow on from her involvement in our Literacy and Heritage Camps and we plan to hold an exhibition of the children’s work in April next year.

We would like to acknowledge our Homework Group Coordinator's, Sue Bacon, Annie Cooper, Carolyn Byrne, Janet Curtain and the late Steve Johnson. Thank you also to all our supporters of the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation who make all this important work possible.
Over the past few years, through all these trips to Portland, I’ve made a good friend in Eric Isaacson, the sagely owner and curator of Mississippi Records. His label is operated out of a little neighbourhood record store bearing the same name and the many hours I’ve spent warming the stool at the counter, chatting and asking dumb questions and listening to LPs has been an education to me. His label reissues lots of old and rare and sometimes neglected music of many styles and from many cultures. I’d been collecting them for years anyway and smuggling overweight piles of them under my arm on the plane home to Australia. Although Mississippi Records has virtually no internet presence they seem to be revered far and wide by many people I meet in my travels. I was even in the store the day Lou Reed rang up just to get any information he could on the label.

I’d been kidding Eric for a while that his catalog had nothing Australian. And then perhaps not too subtly I would regale him with stories about my childhood growing up in Gympie when the Aboriginal band Mop and the Dropouts would drive down from a nearby reserve town called Cherbourg and play for parties in the shed next door. My 10 year old sensibilities would sizzle as those parties were wild and exciting compared to others I’d attended. Groups of people sat gambling round a card table, others danced and sang along with Mop, lots of laughter and yahooing. The music itself I guess resembled other mainstream country singers like Slim Dusty (who had been impossible to avoid growing up in Gympie) but was it’s own ragged interpretation of it. Another big difference was that they’d be singing stories from their own perspective outside the mainstream. These same neighbours played me tapes of Roger Knox and other Koori heroes of south east QLD and by the time I left home to go to college that sound was deeply ingrained.

One day in Portland at the shop I played Eric some 1950s field recordings of the great lost New South Welsh balladeer of the western plains Dougie Young. It made an impression and there was tentative talk about trying to re-release some of those. But when Eric traveled to Australia in 2016 to accompany me on an outback tour and got to hear a lot more Aboriginal music firsthand he agreed that the LP should have a broader, more encompassing scope. Once we’d settled on a tracklist it took about a year for me to to track down all the musician’s families to explain what we wanted to do and get their approval. Everyone seemed more than happy, excited even that these sacred family songs would be heard in America, though slightly perplexed that anyone would wanna buy one of those old scratchy vinyl records!

It might be slightly confusing given that the name we ended up with ‘Buried Country’ comes from a book and CD set by Australian music journalist Clinton Walker that first appeared back in 2000. At the time I devoured that project and it opened my eyes to a whole world of neglected music outside my hometown I might never have heard otherwise. Eric and I agreed that as Clinton had already done so much to champion Aboriginal country music, plus his book was held in such high regard by the families I’d been granted these song rights by, that our LP should be a homage to his tireless work. Clinton not only gave us his blessing to use the name, he also offered us other rarities that had been unearthed since his book’s publication. Perhaps the rarest of all was a cassette demo tape of a band called The Kooriers that had been submitted to a Melbourne label in the 70s and gone unnoticed since then. Beaming out through the tape hiss the singer Bobby McLeod, in a buoyant crooner voice, admonished white Australia, declaring that he was, “sick of being treated like a mangy old dog.” The sentiment was obviously born of frustration but swung in a kinda jazz style, a very sophisticated protest. Why wasn’t this a part of our cannon of political songs already?

Clinton also loaned me a very rare Jimmy Little 45 single (there’s only 2 copies known to exist) with a song called ‘The Coloured Lad’
written by his father, Jimmy Little Snr. I’d read about it somewhere being the first Aboriginal penned protest song but listening to it for the first time it seemed more a measured and heart-wrenching gentle plea for equality. “I’d do anything you say, if you’d only name the day, that you’d only give us coloured lads a chance.” Most perplexingly to me was how did this incredible original song fall through the cracks of history in place of Jimmy’s more famous American gospel covers like Royal Telephone? Was the subject matter a little too raw for mainstream Australia in 1958? How would it sit now?

I felt if we were to include this song on the compilation I needed to understand a little more about its origins and so got in touch with James Henry, Jimmy Little’s grandson, who I soon learned was actually raised by both his grandparents. James is a talented songwriter in his own right, and learned his craft through accompanying his Grandfather to gigs and has since taken a keen interest in where Jimmy Little’s music sits culturally amongst his peers. I spent an afternoon at James’ apartment and listened to very moving stories that breathed real life into ‘The Coloured Lad’ and made it glow with vivid meaning.

James suggested that if I wanted to know more I should contact some of Jimmy’s old band mates, that his guitarist was a great raconteur and living in Armidale. It was that moment, sitting on James’ couch, I had the realisation I’d started something that would take a long time to finish. That is, if I was to do it properly. There were stories of great struggle behind the existence of each song. And they were not my stories to tell.

I started seeking out anyone and everyone I could think of connected to the artists. Family, friends, band mates, peers, fans. I soon worked out that this talking on the phone was too impersonal. I’d have to go and meet them face to face. The next six months was a criss-crossing of pretty much the whole country talking, talking, talking.

I’ll admit I came into it all pretty naïve as to the logistics, and sometimes I’d turn up in a town without knowing if my intended interviewee was even there. I’d just start asking around, first the pub, then the post office. I went forward with blind faith. Alice Springs locals looked at me askance when I said I was just gonna pop over to Papunya, not realising the many hours of corrugated red soil between it and me, and the fact that I’d probably have to hitchhike to meet my schedule. Thankfully it always managed to come together.

And then after many miles, cups of tea and/or glasses of beer I returned home with hours of conversation that I had to disentangle and fashion into some kind of narrative. I also had been given lots of previously unseen photos out of family albums. When I presented all this to Eric patiently waiting back in America he was so moved by the stories he graciously agreed to trying to fit it all into a 36 page full-colour booklet, the largest possible for a single LP.

All this introduction is just the start of the story. There’s so much more to say about the artists themselves. I plan to write more about them and my own personal journey through doing this project, I’m still trying to process it all. It’s where it really gets interesting.

And with only 11 tracks this album is far from definitive. But I’m hoping its gesture will be a launching pad for a lot more great songs and albums to find their way onto vinyl.
The Aboriginal Literacy Foundation is going digital with an innovative scheme to deliver one-on-one tutoring to Indigenous students, including those living in remote areas.

For 20 years the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation (ALF) has been devoted to improving reading and other academic skills of Indigenous children, primarily through providing tutoring programs and supplying books as well as other educational resources.

ALF CEO and founder Dr Tony Cree said digital learning platform Need A Tutor was a new way of connecting students with highly trained and experienced tutors in Melbourne and Ballarat.

“It’s a real step forward,” he said.

“If the child is a long way from the school but can pick up the internet we can tutor quite remote places as well.

“It could even be done on a smart phone but obviously it’s better to have a laptop.”

Dr Cree said online tutoring had a number of benefits, including removing child safety concerns about a child being left one-on-one with an adult and Indigenous cultural sensitivities about male and female adult interaction with boys and girls.

There can also be cultural or logistical reasons why it is difficult for Indigenous students to attend schools, which makes digital tutoring to homes a valuable substitute.

Dr Cree said the hardware was available due to a government push to get computers into schools.

He said he had seen Northern Territory schools with plenty of computer facilities but no library, indeed not even a bookcase.

Even Groote Eylandt, which is a three-hour flight in a small plane from Darwin, has a school with internet facilities.

Dr Cree pointed out that NAPLAN testing indicated Indigenous children in year 6 were roughly three-and-a-half reading years behind their non-Indigenous peers and this gap had not closed in the last 15 or 20 years.

“Our big push is with upper-primary and lower-secondary students,” Dr Cree said.

“The problem is many are going into a secondary school with basically a grade 2 or grade 3 reading ability, so it’s hardly surprising that a lot of them drop out at the first opportunity. If you can’t read, you can’t do the assignments so I don’t think you have much of a chance, do you?

Griffith University research shows that Indigenous Australians with good literacy skills were five times more likely to have a job but also have an improved life expectancy.

“It isn’t just a literacy matter, it’s a job and a health and a lifestyle matter.”

ALF tutoring also includes numeracy skills.

“We try to get students up to a basic level of numeracy so they can face secondary school with some prospect of success,” Dr Cree said.

Providing books and other materials that Indigenous students want to read has long been the mission of the ALF.

“We’ve actually sent 100,000 volumes from Melbourne to schools in Northern Australia in the last two years,” Dr Cree said.

Dr Cree said that new approaches, such as digital tutoring, were something privately-funded not-for-profits such as the ALF have the freedom to try.

“We can afford to experiment and try different things that governments can’t do,” he said.

“Many innovations in health and education are initiated by the private sector. When its seen to work you’ll find the government comes in big time. If this is successful you might very well find it taken up by education departments.”

The ALF is funded by donations from individuals and philanthropic organisations.

“We have no government money but we have very, very strong supporters in the community. We have about 3500 people who subscribe or give money to us directly,” he said.

“Because we have no government money we are rather accountable. Government money can just disappear quite easily but people who give their own money want to know exactly where it’s gone. So we run a pretty tight ship.”

“We really, really appreciate it.”

Article originally appeared in Crosslight Magazine
The Digital Literacy Hub has entered an exciting phase of development: we have begun working with speakers from Arrernte and Pitjantjatjara communities and will soon have our Healthy Living Series translatable from English into both languages. In many Indigenous communities, English is a second language and their schools must negotiate how to balance learning the rich heritage contained in first languages with the practical needs of learning English.

We hope the Digital Literacy Hub will provide a valuable reference point by which to get better understanding of English and Indigenous languages. Translations will be both written and oral with an audio feature that will allow stories to be read aloud.

The Arrernte land runs as far west as Mutitjulu and King’s Canyon, and as far east as the western edge of the Simpson Desert. Arrernte is the traditional language of Alice Springs and has approximately 5,500 speakers.

Pitjantjatjara people live mostly in the northwest of South Australia, extending across the border into the Northern Territory to just south of Lake Amadeus, and west, a short distance into Western Australia. The land is an inseparable and important part of their identity, with roughly 4000 Anangu (as they refer to call themselves) people still living in these areas. Pitjantjatjara have approximately 2,700 speakers.

Working with IYPSoftware, this platform can be extended to feature any Indigenous language, provided there are speakers willing to assist us with the project. We hope to expand the number of languages offered as well as the number of book titles. We consider this platform a powerful tool for both literacy and heritage.

We are grateful for the support of the philanthropic groups and consultants who have contributed to our recent endeavors in the online space.
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The Aboriginal Literacy Foundation is most grateful to individuals or organisations who choose to make a bequest. We would recommend that you inform your solicitor to include a bequest in your will – if you prefer, you can use the form provided below.

I __________________________ wish to bequeath ____________ dollars to the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation.

I would like this bequest to contribute towards:

☐ A library for a remote school
☐ Extending the tutoring program
☐ To provide a school or post-school scholarship
☐ All work currently undertaken by the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation
☐ Other (please specify)

____________________________________________________________________________
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If the donation is towards a school library or a school in the Northern Territory or Northern Queensland, we can arrange for a small named plaque to be placed at the school receiving your donation. Please tick below.

☐ Yes, I would like a plaque to be placed at the school.

Please forward a copy of this form to your solicitor and a copy to the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation at info@aboriginalliteracyfoundation.org

or

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