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## NT dual-generation playgroup program a national awards finalist

A team of Northern Territory educators running playgroups for remote indigenous families from the back of a troop carrier has been named a finalist in the 2012 HESTA Early Childhood Education and Care Awards.

The Families as First Teachers (FaFT) team from Shepherdson College, now operating from a permanent 'shed', has been nominated for the Advancing Practice Award for their dual-generation approach to indigenous health and wellbeing.

Using the playgroup as a medium, the service enables clinical assessment and treatment, early childhood learning, health education services and adult education, in a setting that's comfortable for both the children and their families.

According to Family Educator, Belinda Morton, indigenous children in remote communities are particularly vulnerable to poor health outcomes and the barriers that lead to these outcomes are often experienced in their early years.

"In many of these remote communities, we often see a reluctance to engage with the limited services that are available. There are various reasons for this, including language barriers and differences in what's considered to be 'normal' health," said Ms Morton.

"By having health and education services operate in the playgroup setting, and often in local language, we are breaking through barriers — boosting both child and adult participation.

"So far this year, we have focused on nutrition, food groups, healthy cooking, anaemia, germs, ear health, skin health, teeth cleaning and hygiene, with the aim of improving behaviour and understanding of these important issues throughout the wider community."

The program is jointly funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and the Northern Territory Government, and regularly consults other indigenous health facilities, such as the Aboriginal Resource Development Service.

Services offered by the team include dual-generation playgroups, mobile playgroup outreach service, bush trips, regular community events and home visits/family support. In semester one of this year, 172 of the 230 children aged between zero and three in the area attended the playgroups.

The judges commended the team for taking an innovative approach to working with local communities so that a number of health challenges could be tackled.

The winner of the Advancing Practice Award — and the Outstanding Educator Award — will be announced at a gala dinner during Early Childhood Australia's National Conference, at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre on World Teachers' Day, Friday 5 October 2012. The Advancing Practice winner will receive a \$10,000 development grant, provided by ME Bank.

HESTA is one of Australia's largest super funds, with more than 750,000 members and \$20b in assets. It is chosen by more people working in health and community services than any other fund.

Visit [hestaawards.com.au](http://hestaawards.com.au) to book tickets for the event or learn more about the awards.

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