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Barkly mobile preschool receives national early childhood award

A Northern Territory Indigenous preschool service for remote communities in the Barkly region has won the Excellence in Building Inclusion Award at the 2014 HESTA Early Childhood Education and Care Awards.

Barkly Mobile Preschool Service won the national award for its work with Indigenous families to boost preschool attendance in the communities of Canteen Creek, Epenarra, Corella Creek and Murray Downs.

Preschool Manager, Doris Johnson — an Indigenous community member from the Barkly Tablelands — regularly travels to each community to help local assistant teachers deliver a daily preschool program to four year olds.

She supports children in the region by encouraging their families to become more involved in their child's education and encouraging preschool teachers to complete higher children's services qualifications.

Ms Johnson led the services' implementation of an inquiry-based learning program, with a focus on oral language development and extending children's play into opportunities for learning.

"Attendance data offers early signs that our efforts to build inclusion are working," Ms Johnson said.

"Local principals say that, when our children move into school transition classes, they have a better knowledge of concepts like colours and numbers, and can write their own names."

HESTA CEO, Anne-Marie Corboy, presented Ms Johnson with the Excellence in Building Inclusion Award during a dinner in Melbourne on Saturday 6 September 2014.

"We are delighted to acknowledge Ms Johnson's outstanding commitment to increasing preschool attendance among Indigenous children in the remote Barkly region," Ms Corboy said.

The Barkly Mobile Preschool Service received \$10,000 to further implement the program, courtesy of long-term HESTA awards supporter, ME Bank.

"The prize money will allow us to upgrade facilities at our preschools, provide dog-proof sand play areas and make general improvements to the outdoor environment at each site," Ms Johnson said.

The Advancing Pedagogy and Practice Award winner, KU James Cahill Preschool in NSW and the Outstanding Young Graduate Award winner — Sonya Nedovic of the Royal Children's Hospital Education Institute in Victoria — each received a \$10,000 grant from ME Bank.

ME Bank CEO, Jamie McPhee, said, "We're proud to continue our support of the HESTA Awards program, recognising the tireless contribution of individuals and organisations in health and community services."

HESTA is the super fund for health and community services, with more than 785,000 members and \$28 billion in assets. More people in health and community services choose HESTA for their super.

To learn more about the 2014 winners and finalists visit hestaawards.com.au

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