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NT early childhood education service a finalist in national awards

A Northern Territory council that implemented measures to encourage more Indigenous children to attend early childhood services, is a finalist in the 2014 HESTA Early Childhood Education and Care Awards.

MacDonnell Regional Shire Council is one of five finalists in the Excellence in Building Inclusion Award category.

It delivers local government and social service programs to 13 remote Aboriginal communities in the central Australian region.

The Council has been recognised for overhauling early childhood learning centres, servicing 10 remote Indigenous communities up to 600 kilometres from Alice Springs.

Children's Services Manager, Margaret Harrison, said almost 250 Aboriginal children and their families currently access the early childhood learning centres and the number is steadily growing.

"We began our improvements by engaging with staff, funding providers, other childcare services and local families. We then reviewed all of our practices and met with key stakeholders in remote communities to develop an informed action plan," Ms Harrison said.

"The qualifications and experience of those working in our early childhood programs became a stronger focus and we made sure that all staff were committed to community engagement principles."

The Council also ran extra training for 83 local educators, as part of its commitment to providing local people with access to the training they need to take on roles as educators and develop as future leaders.

"Now, our centres have a strong focus on supporting parents and carers with parenting skills and learning, so that children continue to learn and develop in their home environment," Ms Harrison said.

"It's wonderful to see our children so well supported by all generations in our communities — our learnings have really been embraced.

"The number of children using the service has increased significantly and staff retention has stabilised."

Ms Harrison and other interstate finalists will be flown to Melbourne to attend an awards dinner, where the winners will be announced during the Early Childhood Australia National Conference on Saturday 6 September 2014.

A \$30,000 prize pool will be shared among the winners, generously provided by long-term HESTA awards supporter ME Bank.

The Excellence in Building Inclusion, and Advancing Pedagogy and Practice Award winners will each receive \$10,000 to further implement their program or initiative. The winner of the Outstanding Young Graduate Award will receive a \$10,000 development grant.

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.

Visit hestaawards.com.au for tickets for the awards dinner or to learn more about the awards.

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