

# FOREWORD

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Indigenous projects have featured highly in all funding rounds of the Telstra Foundation Community Development Fund, with almost 30 per cent of projects and funding directed to Indigenous community development. We recognise that in remote, rural and urban communities throughout Australia, Indigenous children and young people are seriously over-represented in all common measures of disadvantage, including poor physical and emotional/mental health, juvenile justice, education and unemployment.

This second volume of *Early Learnings* evaluates a selected number of projects under this priority area. The 14 projects reported on here by the Australian Institute of Family Studies demonstrate that community-identified programs are creating positive opportunities for Australia's Indigenous children.

The feedback we received from the first issue of *Early Learnings* that focused on early childhood development was extremely encouraging. This confirmed to the Telstra Foundation Board that *Early Learnings* can make a valuable contribution towards improving the dissemination and uptake of new knowledge, research and improved service delivery to kids and families, especially those who are most at risk and vulnerable.

Importantly, *Early Learnings* reflects our mission: *to make a positive and lasting difference to the lives of Australian children and young people*. With this in mind, sustainability is a key issue for the Foundation and one that needs to be integrated into all stages of a project's development. For those projects featured in *Early Learnings*, some simply need a good 'resting place' at the end of the project, whereas others are sustained by the organisation and become a part of core business. In some instances, project design and outputs will be taken up by others and transformed to meet their specific circumstances.

We congratulate the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the other Indigenous consultants who joined the evaluation team for the depth and quality of their research. The team was made up of Dr Daryl Higgins (AIFS) as the project manager, Indigenous researchers Ms Sandi Taylor, Ms Leanne Ramsamy and Ms Marlene Burchill (AIFS), and Ms Leah Bromfield (AIFS). The team has a wealth of experience in conducting participatory research in Indigenous community settings and a commitment to strengthening family, culture and community – which is evident in this report.

With Telstra Foundation funding, we wish to support Indigenous communities to identify their own priorities and develop culturally appropriate and effective solutions to meet their needs. We also prefer to fund those projects in which key personnel are Indigenous and which support the skills development and employment of young Indigenous people.

Through developing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities, the Telstra Foundation can play a role in the wider philanthropic sector, model good practice and assist Indigenous organisations to identify alternative sources of funding and support.

Hopefully, in this way we can contribute to the broader goals of the reconciliation process by facilitating dialogue between Indigenous communities and the philanthropic and corporate sectors towards creating on-going partnerships and redressing past injustices.

We welcome your feedback and thoughts.

  
HERB ELLIOTT AC MBE  
CHAIRMAN  
TELSTRA FOUNDATION

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## AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF FAMILY STUDIES



I recently returned from my first visit to the “top end”. In reflecting on that trip, this second volume of the *Early Learnings* Research Report has taken on a special significance, given its focus on Indigenous community development. What I saw on my visit to north Western Australia and the Northern Territory has left many indelible impressions. The mix of hardship, on the one hand, and hope, on the other, was particularly evident in one of the community development initiatives that I visited. While the hardship is impossible to ignore, the hope lay in the growing strength of the community’s commitment to change and to building a better future for their children.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies is especially pleased to be able to be involved in the evaluation of the initiatives funded by the Telstra Foundation, in this instance in 14 Indigenous communities. In writing this second Research Report, the Institute seeks to continue its commitment to disseminating the learnings from child and family focused community development projects across the nation. The opportunity to be involved is especially timely for the Institute as we seek to broaden the focus on Indigenous families in our next Research Plan.

On behalf of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, may I acknowledge the foresight, initiative and commitment of the Telstra Foundation in funding the projects evaluated in this volume. The involvement of the Foundation in this area is an outstanding example of the importance of partnerships between communities, governments, and philanthropic organisations – the essence of what the Prime Minister refers to as the “social coalition”. There is a second sense in which the Report represents an invaluable partnership, in this case between three Indigenous researchers, Marlene Burchill, Leanne Ramsamy and Sandi Taylor, and two non-Indigenous consultants, Dr Daryl Higgins, who managed the evaluation, and Leah Bromfield. Together, they are to be congratulated on a very valuable contribution to our understanding of Indigenous -run community development initiatives. The examples they provide in evaluating the projects powerfully illustrate practical ways in which hardship can be turned to hope.

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AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF FAMILY STUDIES