



## Ring of Fire – Australia July 2010

### [Mary Ward International Australia Edition]



Indigenous Australians are more likely to suffer from low income, unemployment, lack of education, poor housing, substance abuse, high infant mortality rates and family violence than non-indigenous Australians. MWIA is striving to end this disparity by focusing on education and social support programs in remote and rural areas of Australia. Working in partnership with local organisations and governments, we hope to help close the gap and end Indigenous disadvantage.

#### **Strong Young mums – Empowering Women**

MWIA contributes part-funding for “Strong Young Mums” at Centacare Wilcannia-Forbes. This award winning program provides young Aboriginal mothers in Bourke, NSW with the opportunity to achieve Year 10, or above, accreditation. The program encourages the utilisation of early childhood services such as playgroups and childcare; while also focusing on the development of vocational skills. The young women are helped to return to education and develop their parenting skills. With the creation of SYM enterprises, the mothers are developing the skills and knowledge needed to generate their own income. Participants are becoming more aware of the needs of their children and putting them before their own needs. The women have also enrolled in a TAFE course called JobStart that aims to build confidence for job interviews and within work situations. Participants are improving their IT skills, developing

planning and research skills and learning how to prepare job applications.



This Program is giving hope, building confidence and promoting self development for young women. MWIA strongly believes that the Strong Young Mums Program has the potential to create systemic change and to break the generational cycle of poor health, poor educational achievement and family violence in Aboriginal Communities.

#### **Outback PitStop- Creating Change**

CentaCare's *OutBack Pitstop* was recently established with the goal of engaging disadvantaged young Aboriginal men in vocational training and constructive work. The project aims to equip young men (many of whom have been in detention) with a trade for future employment, along with developing a sustainable mechanics workshop for the generations to come.

MWIA supports this project in partnership with Centacare, Bourke TAFE, and the Department of Juvenile Justice. Local elders are also involved, providing general mentoring to participants and supporting

positive transitions to manhood. Funding from MWIA has gone towards purchasing car parts, for the reconditioning and maintenance of two cars that are to be made roadworthy and used by participants for driving practice, and working up their hours towards gaining their driver's license.



It is hoped that OutBack Pitstop will motivate these young men to engage in training, learn a trade, and become employable, whilst encouraging them to take leadership roles in the management and development of the enterprise itself. If the current cycle of Indigenous disadvantage and poverty is to be broken, then it is important that opportunities like this be created *now* for these young people. It is evident that this project has great potential to make a real difference in the lives of young Indigenous lives and we are excited by the possibilities that will be created for their future.

*(Elissa Barry – Mary Ward International Australia)*

### **An Election Looms**

Having deposed our Prime Minister of almost 3 years and replaced him with Julia Gillard, Australia's first female Prime Minister, Australians await a federal election at the end of August. Elections bring out the best and the worst in a nation – they focus attention on policies but they also lay bare prejudices, preoccupations and an inherent desire for a the quick fix.

Indigenous disadvantage, characterised by poor health, high unemployment, sub-

standard housing and inadequate education, is an issue which creates division and unease in the community. While the present government has made considerable efforts to improve Aboriginal health and housing the temptation is always there to “hurry it up” and by-pass the necessary consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Catholic Bishops of Australia urged a supportive and empowering response to issues: *The response (to these issues) must be respectful of Indigenous culture and identity, and must be undertaken in full and genuine partnership with Aboriginal communities themselves. History clearly demonstrates that effective solutions cannot simply be imposed from above.*”

The **Close the Gap Campaign** focuses on Indigenous health, education and employment targets identified by the governments of Australia:

- closing the life expectancy gap within a generation;
- halving the gap in mortality rate for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
- ensuring all Indigenous children of four years old in remote communities have access to quality early childhood programs within five years;
- halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade;
- halving the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment rates or equivalent by 2020; and
- halving the gap in employment outcomes within a decade

The Indigenous projects funded by MWIA are the result of consultation with Indigenous communities and partnerships with government and other agencies. Unless there is consultation and a genuine willingness to listen to the needs of local people Indigenous disadvantage will continue to be a tragic feature of Australian life. *(Libby Rogerson ibvm JPIC)*