

Indigenous Literacy Day

There is a strong tradition of philanthropy at the Bar and one example can be found in the donation of \$65,000 by the silks of 2007 to the Indigenous Literacy Project, a partnership between the Australian book industry and the Fred Hollows Foundation. The following speech was delivered by Peter Tomasetti SC.

Australia is fortunate to count itself among the most literate, well-educated countries in the world, yet within its first-world status there is a stark and an unacceptable level of illiteracy, which sees some of our citizens severely disadvantaged, potentially for life. I refer of course to the state of literacy in remote Indigenous Australia.

On 10 December 1993, the Prime Minister of the day, Paul Keating in his now famous Redfern Speech to mark the Australian Launch of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People said:

Ever so gradually we are learning how to see Australia through Aboriginal eyes, beginning to recognise the wisdom contained in their epic story.

I think we are beginning to see how much we owe the indigenous Australians and how much we have lost by living so apart.

I said we non-indigenous Australians should try to imagine the Aboriginal view.

It can't be too hard. ...

There is one thing today we cannot imagine. We cannot imagine that the descendants of people whose genius and resilience maintained a culture here through 50 000 years or more, through cataclysmic changes to the climate and environment, and who then survived two centuries of dispossession and abuse, will be denied their place in the modern Australian nation.

We cannot imagine that.

We cannot imagine that we will fail.

It is with this spirit of imagination that the NSW Silks of 2007 support the Indigenous Literacy Project, a partnership between the Australian Book Industry and The Fred Hollows Foundation. The project grew from a recognition within the Australian Book Industry of the need to help address the impact that such low rates of literacy is having on the life prospects of those affected.

Through the distribution of funds from donations, the Project's objective is to buy books and other essential materials, and to support programs designed to address



L to R: Francois Kunc SC, Karen Williams, project officer at the Indigenous Literacy Project and Peter Eichhorn, ILP Committee member

illiteracy in remote Indigenous communities particularly amongst the young.

The Fred Hollows Foundation, through whose Literacy programs the Project's funds are spent, is an organisation uniquely positioned in Australia to help. Their commitment to addressing chronic health problems in these communities carries with it an explicit understanding of the proven links between education and literacy levels and healthy outcomes. As an organisation the Fred Hollows Foundation has demonstrated an outstanding capacity to work within these communities, to work for solutions and relationships from within, which gives this Project its best chance of success.

The Silks of 2007 are very proud to be associated with the Indigenous Literacy Project and the Fred Hollows Foundation.

We are proud to announce our donation of \$65,000 to assist in this essential work. It is singularly appropriate that this group of NSW

barristers with the privilege of an education and possessed of literacy skills do something to advance literacy in those who are not so fortunate through no fault of their own.

There was a time when white Australians believed that because our indigenous Australians had no written history, their very existence could be denied.

This donation will go to the immediate expansion of the literacy of indigenous people in over 20 communities in remote Northern Territory, to Warburton in Western Australia and to six communities in NSW including: Wilcannia, Engonnia, Ivanhoe, Brewarrina, Bourke and Menindee.

It is the intent of the Silks of 2007, that through this gift, Aboriginal people will be able to better fight for their rightful place in the modern Australian nation.