2013 ALIA NT Recognition Award won by the NTL i-stories team

The Northern Territory Library (NTL) i-stories team has won the 2013 ALIA NT Recognition Award for the development of a bilingual flash card app called NTLanguages. The Award was recently presented to the team at a dinner held during Australian Library and Information Week. The NTL i-stories team win the ALIA NT Recognition Award trophy and $300 cash. A special thanks goes to Raeco for continuing to provide sponsorship for this annual award.

NTLanguages is a flash card language app comprising everyday words and phrases in Anindilyakwa and English that are illustrated with simple pictures, photographs and videos. The new bilingual literacy tool was developed in partnership with Groote Eylandt Linguistics, AllRemote Pty Ltd, and Disparity Games and launched in April 2013. Versions of the app are now available as free downloads for iPhone, iPad, Android, and for desktop or laptop use.

English is the second, third, or fourth language for most residents of the Aboriginal communities on Groote Eylandt. Conversely, most English-speaking workers and visitors to the region have limited knowledge of local Aboriginal languages. The app is designed for people of all ages, both Anindilyakwa and English speakers. It is a phrase book rather than a dictionary, containing useful words and phrases in both languages, such as “I’m hot”, “I’m hungry”, “My name is...”

The response to the app has been extremely positive, with attention from users, the general public, and the mainstream media. The app was featured on ABC radio by host Vicki Kerrigan, in an interview with Angela Jane, Project Manager with the MJD Foundation on Groote Eylandt. Angela and her clients are using the app to assist daily interactions together.

Community linguists use NTLanguages as a teaching tool for very young Groote Eylandters, who often speak Kriol at home. The app is a fun way for little ones to learn, and a valued contribution to preserving local language. At the same time, young Kriol-speakers also learn useful English words and phrases before commencing school.

IndigenousX is a rotating twitter account that aims to promote Indigenous stories to a broad audience. A recent tweet on IndigenousX shouted out “I cant wait until a Gamilaaraay/Yuwaalaraay one is developed. They are inspired!”

Our favourite story is from the foster mother who is caring for a child from Groote Eylandt, wondering if there were any language resources from the region. She is thrilled with the app that enables them to communicate simple directions and requests to each other.

Future plans include: adding more phrases to the existing Anindilyakwa-English app, and working with other communities to source and secure funding to develop apps in other languages.
NTLanguages was developed as a component of a long-running NTL collaborative project with Aboriginal communities on Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The project is known as i-stories.

i-stories is an NTL outreach program focused on parental and community engagement through the use of current technology such as iPads: for learning, accessing information, communicating, creative expression, digitalized recording, preserving and sharing contemporary and historical stories. i-stories is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations under the Parental and Community Engagement (PaCE) program.

i-stories exceeded the participation target for each reporting cycle, offering local employment and generating the active involvement of families, local youth, local government, schools, community services, visiting workers and researchers. In June 2013 East Arnhem Shire Council received an award for their support of i-stories in the Active Arts Category of the National Awards for Local Government. This award recognizes and celebrates the collaborative achievements of local government, community, Northern Territory Library, AlRemote Pty Ltd, and the MJD Foundation. Al Remote Pty Ltd is leading the expansion of i-stories in 2013, and including the SE Arnhem coastal community of Numbulwar.

In all locations community members have quickly adopted tablet technology as a more portable, user-friendly, and flexible option than PCs. Several platforms exist to showcase community created content, including the NTL digital repository Territory Stories, and the Community Stories database - award-winning purpose-built software for managing local content in Aboriginal communities. Diane Kearney, Manager of Libraries and Knowledge Centres for the local shire reported that i-stories has brought “cultural and social benefits to Groote Eylandt, with a range of age groups now accessing the library”. We see young mums with their babies enjoying early learning apps on iPads, teenagers downloading music from iTunes and video clips from uTube, as well as older people, looking at photographs and reminiscing about times gone past, keen to record their stories in the local Community Stories digital archive.

Over several years NTL has boosted digital capability on Groote Eylandt and provided community-wide internet access on Bickerton Island. In three Aboriginal communities there are now Wi-Fi walk-up hot spots to libraries and other community venues. The walk-up hot spots can be accessed 24/7 within a 100m radius. A great resource for anyone with their own portable device or mobile phone.

Local employment is a key element of i-stories. In 2012 NTL contracted several collaborating

onsite organisations to manage employment of local community members in i-stories. Employment and training includes local musicians and filmmakers, who now use libraries and cloud storage as a valued resource for ready access to their materials. In addition, NTL has been able to provide a wage subsidy to enable Community Library Officers to work extra hours, teaching people how to use iPads and iMacs, to record stories, and as a resource to retrieve information.

Northern Territory Library and AIRemote Pty Ltd, who together designed and deliver i-stories, have identified seven success factors that enable parental and community engagement with the arts and technology, for learning, accessing information, communicating with family and friends, recording and sharing stories. These success factors are guidelines for practice rather than a prescription for action. If these seven elements are present then this approach can be successful in other community libraries.

1. Libraries linking learning at home and school
2. Learning across generations: old to young, and young to old
3. Onsite coordination
4. Partnering with local service providers, building on existing services rather than duplication
5. Employing and building capabilities of local people with current and emerging technologies
6. Recording and sharing local content
7. Promoting a regional approach, by language and family groupings

An undertaking of this kind is responsive to place. Any urban, rural or remote community library can apply the seven elements listed above to their own context, to successfully involve people in learning, creating and consuming local arts and culture.

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