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## **Top-quality, low-cost preschool takes top national award**

Buninyong Preschool — an initiative of Dubbo and District Preschool providing educational services to Aboriginal children — has won the Advancing Practice Award at the 2012 HESTA Early Childhood Education & Care Awards.

Nominated for providing Aboriginal and low-income families in the area access to high-quality, non-fee paying early childhood education, the preschool stood out from more than 600 nominations.

Since the preschool's establishment in 2010, it has seen a doubling of enrolments and increased its opening days. This has translated into increased enrolments of "school-ready" children at the local kindergarten, Buninyong Public School.

The Advancing Practice award recognises early childhood education professionals who have initiated practice improvements that benefit children or the community.

According to Louise Simpson — Director of Buninyong Preschool, and Dubbo and District Preschool — the ultimate aim of the initiative is to increase exposure to preschool education within the local Aboriginal community and build a positive relationship between the two.

"Before we began this initiative, many Aboriginal children in the area were unlikely to have any schooling experience prior to kindergarten, largely thanks to barriers such as cost," Ms Simpson said.

"We work with the children and Buninyong Public School, and build our curriculum around the identified needs. In doing so, we build the child's sense of belonging at the preschool, which has positive long-term results for future education.

"Children who have graduated from Buninyong Preschool have demonstrated improved transition to school, higher confidence in their abilities and higher attendance rates."

The judges commended the nomination for taking a proactive approach toward tackling real social issues.

The facility hopes to expand in the future by sourcing capital funds to extend the current building and further engage with parents and guardians, and the local Aboriginal community.

Ms Simpson received a \$10,000 development grant at a gala dinner in Perth last night. All prize money is provided by ME Bank.

HESTA is one of Australia's largest super funds, with more than 750,000 members and \$20 billion in assets. It is chosen by more people in health and community services than any other fund.

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