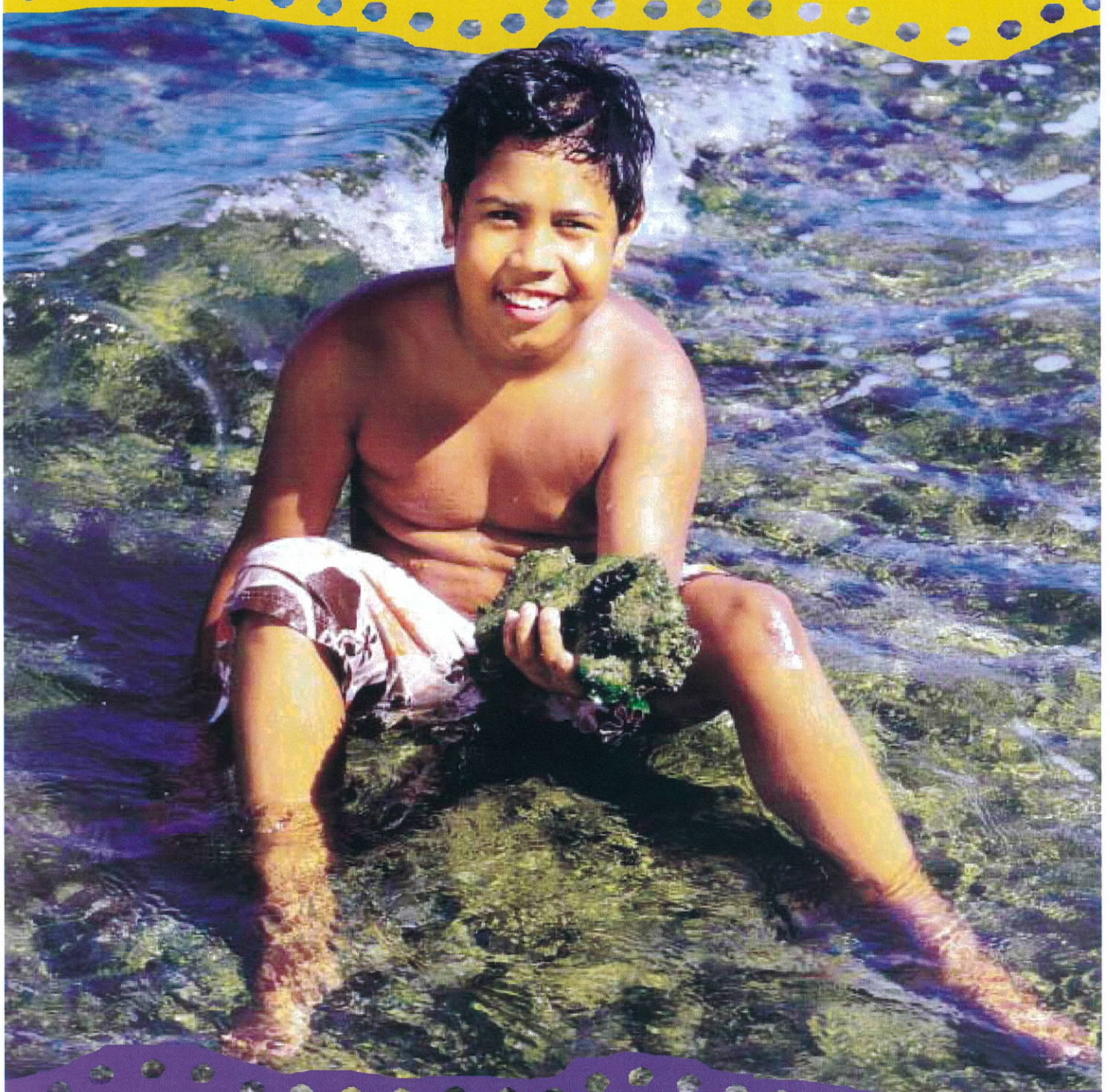




# WA Aboriginal

## Housing Infrastructure Council News



Water Issues in  
Communities

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There is an important need for repairs and maintenance for housing provided under various Indigenous housing programs, to address a backlog of maintenance and achieve a greater level of sustainability of housing conditions.

*Project Manager Joseph Higgins teaching at Punmu community*

## The **FIXING HOUSES** for Better Health Program

Indigenous housing encounters many problems regarding health-related issues. Two of the biggest faced by organisations in their administration of community housing are asset management and rent collections.

There is a direct link between health related issues and effectiveness of housing repairs and maintenance.

Staff at the Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Directorate (AHID) have had consultations with the Department of Community Development and an environmental health and design consultancy firm called Healthabitat on its "assess and fix" approach to health hardware. The "assess and fix" approach involves an on-the-spot assessment of the condition and required repair of houses. This approach also allows for provision of urgently required maintenance.

The key points of this approach focus on safety and health.

"Safety and health issues include things like the safe delivery of water within the house, a functioning bathroom including hot water and suitability for adults and children and a functioning laundry with water," Project Manager Joseph Higgins said.

"It is also vital to have functioning toilets, sinks, drains and rubbish removal as well as a working kitchen with stove, reliable power and a safe hygienic food preparation and storage area. A safely designed and installed gas and electrical systems must be part of the kitchen plan."

Mr Higgins said the "assess and fix" approach includes the immediate fixing of houses by survey teams and licensed trades (plumber & electrician).

"The plan also involves community support and involvement, training of community members and payment for work done during the program.

"These are important aspects of the approach, while a detailed recording of data to assist in decision making and making improvements to design and specifications is also required."

As a result of the consultations with Healthabitat on the "assess and fix" approach, AHID in conjunction with private company, Practical Management and Development (PM&D) through the Health Habitat program, have set up a system to work with the Directorate in the implementation of urgent housing maintenance. This program is called "Fixing Houses for Better Health 2."

This is to be undertaken in consultation with the Aboriginal Housing Infrastructure Unit Directorate and the Department of Community Development. It is intended that the project will deliver basic repairs to 1000 houses across Australia in the next two years including 176 in Western Australia.

The Fixing Houses for Better Health project in W.A. will involve AHID and PM&D engaging tradesmen to work in teams with community members. This will involve two surveys, as detailed in the diagram below;

The project is not a substitute for routine maintenance by Indigenous housing organisations and will not undertake maintenance such as painting, replacing floor coverings or repairing damage that is not directly affecting health or safety. It will only provide urgent repairs of safety or health hazards and covers an estimated 10 per cent of total housing maintenance requirements. No major renovations will be provided and the cost per house of the actual "assess and fix" is estimated at \$5,000 per house.

"As well as the direct benefits of repair work, on the job training and employment will be provided to community residents," Mr Higgins said.

"It is expected that the project will also achieve improved health and hygiene and improved awareness of relationships between basic housing maintenance and the targeted communities.

"It will also result in greater community exposure to and involvement in "healthy housing" approaches and in monitoring health hardware and undertaking effective local repair programs."

Mr Higgins said this would also result in a greater acceptance and use of "healthy housing" approaches within Indigenous housing programs.

