



**Speech at the Opening of the New Secondary Campus at
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School**

by

Tobias Nganbe, Co-Principal

Ngepan Kangkarlmawu (God's Spirit) Secondary Campus

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School

20 November, 2007

Today the people of the Thamarrurr Region celebrate because God has been good to us. He gave us this great region and has taught us to live with the land. He taught our ancestors all the things we know today. Let us all give thanks and praise for His blessings and His great love for us.

We celebrate the opening of this facility which we have named:-

“Ngepan Kangkarlmawu” – God’s Spirit.

It is an appropriate name that fits with what our people believed in through the ages. In our culture we believe that God’s Spirit is everywhere and is all around us because everything is sacred. This Spirit that has been with our ancestors will bring our young people together through the education they will receive in this special place.

We are here as one nation of the Thamarrurr Region in our three ceremonial groups:-

- **Tjarnpa**
- **Wangka**; and
- **Lirrga**.

We are also here with our many non-Indigenous friends. All of us come together to celebrate the start of a new era in the history of this community’s education, the started by the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart nuns back in the 1940’s.

This education has stepped up because on 1 July 2007, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School was recognised as a mainstream Catholic school. We hold great hope that this new funding system will help us in our effort to improve the education outcomes for all our students.

For thousands of years we, the people of this region, lived with our beliefs, customs and strong relationships. The different clan and family groups looked after and taught their children about our culture. They told of our creation, the Dreaming, through stories of people, animals, plants, the land, sea and the universe. They taught verbally, through paintings, songs and dance. As our ancestors lived with the land they developed many skills and knowledge and through time these were handed down to

us. In time it is this strong culture, this knowledge and these skills that we will continue to pass on to our children.

Though we are from the Tjarnpa, Wangka and Lirrga groups, everyone here has a relationship with one another through the kinship system. These relationships now go further because some of our non-Indigenous friends have been adopted by local families. They were given names that connect them to the land and we are proud to have them as family members. We work together and we take them to our homelands to fish, hunt and tell stories about our people.

Together we also continue our educational journey. We seek to provide our young people with the best Western education in this day and age, especially now that we have this new secondary building.

The education process must be in the hands of those with experience, expertise and ability. This means we must have the best people, those highly qualified and most dedicated to teach our young people and work with them to make education real for their lives and the lives of our people. It is important for these teachers to work side by side with our local and assistant teachers as a team to achieve our goals.

Our people and the Thamarrurr Regional Council, with the support of many other dedicated people, have pressured the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments and their agencies to have the services provided for education that our people deserve. Numerous meetings and workshops were held because our people realised that our children were missing out immensely. We have lodged a complaint in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission such is our concern at the way we have been treated in past times (please [click here](#) for further information).

We know what we want – we want a quality education offered to our children – and so today is the beginning of a new page in the history of education in the Thamarrurr Region. The learning process that is now taking place and building in our community will continue to improve as a result of this new facility.

We want both Governments to continue to work, to plan and implement education together with our people. We want recognition of this school as a Regional High School, a school that grows to include future accommodation for boarders, a school that is serviced by better roads that improve access between communities, with a bus service provided for the children to travel to and from their homes.

It is the wish and the aim of the people of the Thamarrurr Region to produce strong leaders for tomorrow by giving quality education, with the right teachers, to the children and young adults of today.

With happiness and pride in our hearts we celebrate with our old people who have gone before us. We celebrate with them and recognize their spirit is here with us today, especially with our youth. We look back and see the courage and authority they had when they first met non-Indigenous people and tried hard to fit into this new way of life. I know the people are thinking and praying for their old people as we gather here on this great day.

This facility is an incentive for all children in this township and the region, especially the little ones in Early Childhood and Primary. From there they will look forward to the day they will go in as senior students themselves. The future leaders here with us are feeling happy, excited and more comfortable because for the first time they have their own special place in which to learn – they no longer have to mix in with the primary children of the school. The community will give them support in every way possible to do their best to succeed. We ask both the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments to do the same.

I remind everyone here today that this is only Stage 1 of the secondary facility – this township has almost 1,000 people of school age and so we will be working closely with both Governments to make sure Stage 2 is built in the near future, with Stage 3 to follow soon after. The important thing to remember is that we – the parents, families and community members of the Thamarrurr Region – must continue to encourage all children to come to school every day to learn; to come every day in early years so that when they reach secondary they will find learning easy.

Everyone knows and understands that EDUCATION is the key that opens the doors of opportunity. Like many people at Wadeye and the region my vision for the school is to produce strongly educated young men and women to become leaders in their community. I want to see them stand up straight and tall, to be proud of who they are, proud of their parents, to look people straight in the eye and say what clan they are from; to say what is in their hearts and to make the right decisions as leaders of their own people.

I want them to understand and appreciate how the wider community operates and how to live in this great land called Australia. For example, when I retire I want to see them, after they have worked hard and saved their money, organise travel down to Melbourne to watch their favourite team play in the AFL Grand Final at the MCG; to mix in and feel comfortable just being part of the crowd enjoying the game; to walk down the street in the big cities and feel confident to do what ever they want to do. Then head back to Wadeye and say to themselves, *“It’s just one of those things that I like doing”*.

I see this as a time of new beginning, a time to say these youth can and must learn, a time where they must be pushed forward to their full potential, a time where the community must come together and take full responsibility and control of our children’s education. It is a time where the educators must build the individual student as a whole, complete person, spiritually and physically.

It is time to help support these future leaders to build on their knowledge and skills so that they feel confident to cope in the wider community. It is a crucial time to fill in this huge gap between what they don’t know and have been missing out on to what will help them manage their life better. It is time to support the students in bringing out the best in them and build a strong foundation.

I can remember when I went to school back in the late sixties and seventies, the teachers made us work hard to learn; learn so that we may have a future in today’s society. They saw in us the values, the strengths and the confidence to grow into strong individuals and they tried to build from that.

The important message that I certainly received from my teachers was, *“I was special; I was intelligent and I can do anything I want if I come to school and learn”*. I certainly took notice of those important messages.

Mind you, there were many sad days also in terms of saying the opposite. For example, I wanted to go and sing on an Eisteddfod in Darwin with other children, but one of them said my voice was not good enough. We all know this is one of the negatives that can stop children from coming to school to learn and so, as educators and people that work with them, we must be aware of this situation all the time.

Today we have many future leaders with us that need to hear and understand this positive message. As parents, families and educators, that is our utmost responsibility.

We want to give our youth the opportunity to see the world beyond what they live in today. Through this education we want to open their minds and give them the knowledge to explore life outside Wadeye and the Thamarrurr Region; to help them grow strong; to take risks in learning for themselves; to make their own choices.

All these things go to explain what I mean by saying:- **EDUCATION IS THE KEY.**

We understand there are going to be many challenges and difficult times in the years ahead, but there will also be many successful, happy times. These are the times we will come together as a proud community of Wadeye and the Thamarrurr Region to celebrate. On behalf of the people of Wadeye and the Thamarrurr Region, I thank everyone that has been involved to improve education for our children from day one to make this the first of our many dreams come true.

A special thankyou to Boniface Perdjert, Felix Bunduck, Gregory Mollinjin, Matthew Pultchen and the Kardu Diminin clan group for allowing us to build this beautiful secondary facility on their land.

On this great day for Education we cannot go by without saying a special thankyou to a very special person. She has been greatly involved in education for this community, long before many of us teachers were born. She has taught our parents, she has taught

us, she has taught our children and now, she is still teaching our grandchildren to read each morning – we love her. Please put your hands together for Sr. Emmanuel.

To those that I have not mentioned who have worked very long and hard behind the scenes on behalf of the people, I sincerely thank you all.

Lastly, I want to thank all the children, the senior boys and girls for coming to school. I know it's hard sometimes, but I encourage them to continue to come everyday.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School will continue to grow strong and improve to become a school where all the children will come to learn, be happy and grow to be strong individuals.

I finish with our motto – that, through education, we must ...

“GIVE EVERY KID A CHANCE”.

Thank you everyone and God bless.