

PILBARA SPEECH FOR ASSEMBLY 10th NOVEMBER

Good Morning Mr Tarlinton, Brother Anthony, staff, Guests and fellow Joe - boys. My name is Daniel Gibbons and today, Coedie Anderson and I will be talking about a recent immersion we attended.

On the 23rd of September this year, thirteen Year 9 boys accompanied by Mrs Maher, Mr Morgan and Penny from Catholic Mission, embarked on a journey that would change us forever. The trip was for ten days to a remote Aboriginal community called Warralong, which is in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

The purpose of this immersion was for the students and staff to learn more about Indigenous culture, whilst working alongside the children in the Strelley Community School. As we were actually staying in the school we were privileged to share fully in the day to day lifestyle of the Aboriginal people, witnessing and participating in their day to day comings and goings whilst attempting to observe the inextricable connection our Indigenous brothers and sisters have with the land/desert and the sea.

The Strelley community school is run by a lady principal called Kate McKenzie. She does amazing work developing the skills of the children attending the school. For many of these children there would be no opportunity of formal schooling if this school did not exist. The school does not just provide an education; it also provides the children with a safe haven, breakfast, showering facilities and clean clothes on a daily basis.

We arrived at the community at night after a long day of travelling. It was very apparent, even in the darkness, that we were entering a community that was struggling; the poverty was evident. On arrival us boys were shown to our sleeping quarters, the library floor! We laid out their sleeping mats and our sleeping bags and settled into what was to be 'home' for the next 10 days.

The first morning revealed the community to us all in the full light of day. The Warralong children were eager to meet us Joe-boys and relationships were quickly established. The basketball court on the edge of the school provided the perfect opportunity for us boys to begin the task of breaking down barriers. Once word was out that Joeys had arrived, the children flooded onto the

basketball court eager to meet their new friends. From there on in each day began in the same way.

During the trip we managed to meet many of the elders and members of the community and our eyes were really opened to the situation in these remote communities. A couple of things that I will always remember about the trip is the amount of piggy back and shoulder rides we all gave, and the relationships that were formed so easily and quickly.

As well as playing sport and talking with the kids on the AFL field or on basketball court, which was definitely the main attraction of the community, we held arts and crafts sessions, a swimming day and a disco. We also went to a watering hole in Marble Bar, watched a travelling theatre company perform a play about the Spinifex Express and had a cookout under the stars where we ate damper and Kangaroo tail. We also went to Cape Keraudren and Pardoo for a day.

The cookout proved to be a highlight. During the evening entire trees were set on fire, to keep us safe from bad spirits, and the kangaroo tails were wrapped in foil and thrown on the fires. It was fascinating to watch the Aboriginal women as they expertly made damper. The flour, mixed with water and moulded into a flat pancake shape was then placed in the hot embers of a sandy fire and covered in hot sand. The end product was a round loaf of hot, crunchy bread. Sitting under the stars, with fires all around us and surrounded by hospitality from a people that drew us into their community was humbling. The poverty suddenly seemed ours. The sharing of culture was not something that we could offer. The sharing of food was theirs. The desire to draw us in was from them. The land that we sat on to share their meal was theirs. We were the guests there to witness and share in a richness that we could never return.

The ten days passed too quickly and it seemed that in no time at all we were heading back to Sydney. Farewells were said, contact details exchanged and relationships cemented.

We would like to thank Mr Maher and Mr Morgan for accompanying us on the trip and Mr Tarlinton for supporting the immersion. Whilst we were in the Pilbara we painted an art work with the help of one of the community painters. All 13 boys contributed to this art work. We would like to take this opportunity

to present this to Mr Tarlinton as a sign of our appreciation of this amazing immersion to the Warralong community. We hope that it will be placed where we can be reminded of our trip and the role we played and hope to continue to play in serving others.