

## Homeland Education at Murrungga

Parents the world over face difficult decisions when it comes to their children's education. For people living in Australia's remote homelands such decisions can be much more difficult despite the options being somewhat more limited. Many homelands do not have a large enough population to support a school, particularly a secondary school program. This leaves parents and carers with three main choices: moving away from traditional country into a larger town, sending their children to boarding school, or establishing a School of the Air program.

Murrungga is one of the lucky few homelands which after a lot of hard work, continues to reap the rewards of classroom education on country.

Murrungga is a small island off the coast of East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. Access to the homeland is via a small plane or boat from the township of Milingimbi some 27 kilometres away. Despite its remoteness, Murrungga is a vibrant place and its residents have strong aspirations for their future. Much of the homeland's vibrancy emanates from its Homeland Learning Centre which has become a hub of education and innovation. One of the benefits of the Homeland Learning Centre, particularly for older students is that participants are far away from the distractions of life in larger towns where the school drop-out rate is high.



*Murrungga homeland from the air*



*Secondary Program participants gather at Murrungga*



*Customary Law Program participants*

The Homeland Learning Centre was established in 1986 and was initially only operated as a two day per week primary school. In 2009 the Learning Centre was selected to host a residential secondary school program in addition to its now full time primary program. The secondary program operates for one week every month when around 60 students from three surrounding homelands come to Murrungga for a week of customary and mainstream education taught by local Aboriginal teachers as well as specialists from elsewhere. As local teacher, born and bred in Murrungga, Laurie Milinditj says, "they will be safe here and learn about the things for their future life... how they're going to look after themselves in the future."

Murrungga was chosen over other homelands as a suitable location for

the residential program because of its reliable energy supply generated by the Bushlight renewable energy system which was installed in 2006. Reliable energy plays a crucial role in any classroom, and particularly in a residential situation. Firstly, the energy from the Bushlight system allows a range of electronic technologies to be used such as computers and projectors, and film and music equipment. It provides suitable lighting at night and refrigeration so that food can be stored for the students during the week. The quiet renewable energy system also eliminates the interference of a noisy generator.

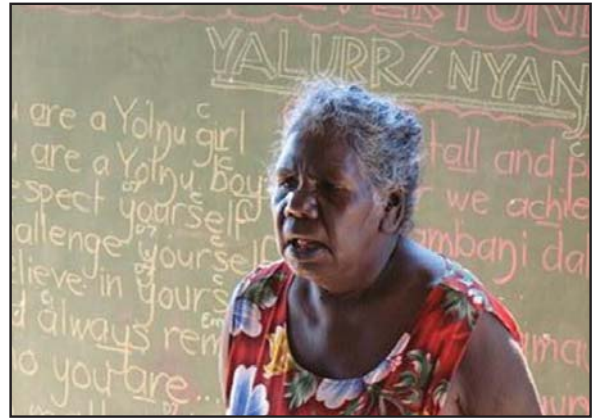
Before the Bushlight system was installed, the energy supply was not consistent enough for refrigeration and residents were spending a lot of money on diesel in addition to the

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costs of making regular plane trips (\$290 each way) to buy food and diesel.

The homeland's growing sense of empowerment and achievement is evident in resident's pride over the recently completed extension to the existing school building. Housed in this new extension, the secondary school program will continue to create students both well grounded in their customary law and traditions while being confident and engaged in mainstream Australian culture.



Laurie Milinditj teaching at Murrungga Learning Centre

## New system enclosure for Bushlight

Every organisation must grow and adapt to meet its customer's needs and non-government entities like Bushlight are no exception. Since the Bushlight capital works program commenced operations in 2002 the size of homelands that we work in and the energy demand within them has grown substantially.

Things like school buildings, water pumping facilities, and large offices and workshops are becoming more common in homelands. To ensure our systems are adequately sized to meet such demands, Bushlight has recently designed a new system enclosure.

The new enclosure fulfills the same role as the original one but has additional capabilities. It stands at the centre of the community power system, controlling the solar input into the batteries via the solar charge controllers. The inverter converts

the battery power to AC power and in its hybrid application turns on the generator to meet high loads or to charge the battery bank on cloudy days.

The most noticeable difference with the new enclosure is the new SP Pro inverter from Selectronic. The inverter is too large to fit inside the enclosure as the previous version did, so it sits on a stand alongside.

The SP Pro is an 18kW single phase inverter which can deliver 50% more power than the previous inverters used by Bushlight. It is also capable of handling very large surge loads such as those created by pumping stations or industrial motors. The new enclosure allows for up to 38kW of solar panels which is almost twice as much as the previous version and it is capable of controlling a bigger generator and can therefore deliver approximately 50kW of continuous

power to a community.

Factory testing of the new system is complete, and the first off the factory floor will soon be installed in two large homelands, one near Pormpuraaw in Far North Queensland and one in remote western Arnhem land.



Factory testing of the new enclosure

**Bushlight Central Australia**  
Desert Peoples Centre  
PO Box 8044  
ALICE SPRINGS NT 0871  
Phone: (08) 8959 6205  
Fax: (08) 8959 6111  
rmcentral@bushlight.org.au

**Bushlight North Queensland**  
7/330 Sheridan St  
PO Box 6182  
CAIRNS QLD 4870  
Phone: (07) 4031 0505  
Fax: (07) 4031 0431  
rmcairns@bushlight.org.au

**Bushlight Top End**  
Suite 2/20 Knuckey St  
GPO Box 2875  
DARWIN NT 0801  
Phone: (08) 8981 8706  
Fax: (08) 8981 7233  
rmtopend@bushlight.org.au

**Bushlight Kimberley WA**  
3/68 Clarendon St  
PO Box 1304  
DERBY WA 6728  
Phone: (08) 9191 2585  
Fax: (08) 9191 2598  
rmderby@bushlight.org.au