



Yolŋu Translators Graduate By Hannah Harper

Issue #41 November 2025

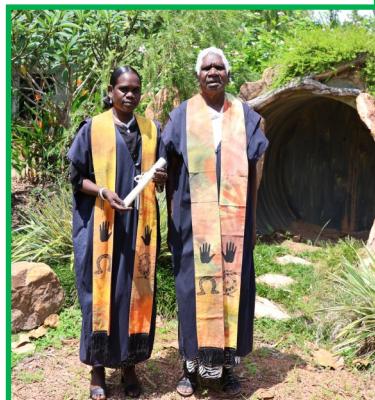


For four weeks in August and September, Yolŋu from Galiwin'ku, Milingimbi and Ramingining spent time together translating a Bible story from English to Djambarrpuŋu, also with the vision of translating the story into other clan languages in the future. Students heard, read, dramatised, wrote and recorded most of Exodus 1-3, the story of Moses' early life and it was a joy to be immersed in this timeless story. There were many difficult words in the story and students showed amazing skill at unpacking the meanings of words in English, Yolŋu languages and Hebrew! AuSIL Consultant Lynette Wilson was an amazing support to students in the whole translation process – from exegesis to final checks. The final week of our course got very busy as the group also recorded portions of Scripture with Global Recording Network (GRN).

Over the last four years, 24 Yolŋu from Northeast Arnhem Land have trained in translation at Nungalinya College. This diverse cohort included some experienced teachers and translators and many younger and emerging language workers. Yurranydjil Dhurrkay and Djawut Gondarra were the Indigenous trainers and I worked with them to prepare and deliver the training and

assessment. The final four week study block covered the last two of eight units in the Certificate II in Indigenous Translating.

A PROJECT OF THE NORTHERN REGIONAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITING ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER CHRISTIAN CONGRESS AND THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA NORTHERN SYNOD



Yolnu Translators Graduate

continued



In the middle of September, many people gathered at Nungalinya College to celebrate the graduation! 13 people donned robes on the day, and Principal Yane also acknowledged the 11 students who completed a significant amount of training but who couldn't be with us on the graduation day. We thanked God for many others who have taught and worked so hard to support this group: Lizz, Mally, Goluŋ, Jerry, Abby, Miliminydjarrk, Janice, Mätjarra, Doreen, Kathy, Lynette, Jenny, Lachlan, Mark W, NT Library and Archives, Bachelor Institute CALL Collection, ARDS, Ben vG, Mark H, Rrikili, Ganygulpa, Margaret, Bec, Jenny, Sal, Trish, admin and residential staff. Representatives from Coordinate, Bible Society, AuSIL, CMS and the churches meet together regularly as the Nungalinya Translating Certificate Steering Committee, and they made this course possible. Thanks be to God!

At the end of this busy course, many participants said, "We wish we had more time," though we all knew it was time to go home and rest! Please pray that people would indeed have more time to continue this great work of sharing God's Word in first languages. Ask God to guide Yolnu church leaders and the agencies and individuals who partner with them, as



Yungirrja, Yurranydjil, Ganumbali



they choose how to prioritise translating and training. Pray for all participants and their families, that they would follow God's leading for next steps in translating and language work. Thank you all so much for your prayers and support – God has indeed heard and known and answered us.

Yolŋu Graduation Jesse's story by David Crawford



Yane & Jesse

I'm telling a story, the off-shoot from Cert 2 Graduation. My Yapa Jesse Murrargirrargi rang from Milingimbi this morning. She graduated Cert 2 recently. [We had a mutual sister die in hospital on Saturday morning, and an older 'granddaughter' in Palmerston, suddenly on Sunday morning. Totally unexpected. So much sorrowful networking with all family.]

Anyway, she went to evening fellowship on Friday night in Milingimbi, and took her translation work & Bible with her. On arrival she was told she was the preacher. She was shocked, and "unprepared". So she read them her translation of Gupapunygu John 1. People were stunned. And said, "Those are not YOUR words, they are GOD'S words. It is not a human speaking. We can feel God speaking to us thru those words. It is so POWERFUL!!"

Jesse was totally humbled - she felt she was completely unprepared. But she wasn't.

Then went on to reminisce about when she was a teenage school girl. She and her sister ran to church after school ready for choir practise with Beulah Lowe. [I'm sure Jesse did language work with her too. She often mentions Beulah.]

Jesse was actually quite on cloud 9 when she spoke to me - despite recent bereavements. God is good.



Jesse & her son-in-law

Our Loss and Heaven's Gain! Vale to 2 Long-Time Faithful Coordinate Partners



Dan Armstrong, a minister, evangelist and friend, has always been welcomed by Yolŋu, since the revival days of 1980s. He shared for many years through KAIROS ministries along with his wife, Sue. He valued the Yolŋu Bible Translation work deeply, and kept in touch, encouraging this work from 'down south' right up to this year - such a faithful servant of God. We share our deep sympathies with Sue. Our loss is heaven's gain! A Memorial Service was held on 27th June in Newcastle, New South Wales.

Felicity Field was one of the Gumatj Translation Team during the 1970s and 1980s at Yirrkala. She has continued to be a faithful supporter of Bible Translation work in 'the north' since she retired to Victoria. Felicity was a prayer warrior deeply committed to Coordinate's projects. In her last weeks, she was praying earnestly with her friends in Morwell for the Gumatj team checks on the Old Testament. How we needed them! Obstacles dissolved and the current translation team were able to enter into workshop mode almost immediately! Thankyou Lord for the prayers of your faithful ones. The news of Felicity's passing arrived while the Gumatj team at their workshop in July! We are sad but so thankful for Felicity's partnership. She is now at rest with her Lord. A Thanksgiving Service for Felicity was held on 8th August in Morwell, Victoria.



Many Hands Make Light Work

By Margaret Miller

It was with our many Coordinate partnerships, collaborating together, that this year kicked off with a very successful workshop at Nungalinya College. Of the 24 experienced indigenous translators that attended, 11 different language groups were represented from West and East Arnhem land. All found the studies each morning stimulating, digging into the Hebrew and Greek origins of the names of God. At the same time, all present had opportunities to encourage each other in their faith as they wrestled with the translation tasks at hand for their own project. Since then, the translators of each project have pressed on towards their individual goals throughout the year, each in their own unique way.

WARRAMIRI: Yungirrja and Mally

In the first half of the year, Dorothy Yungirrja and Mally McLellan met weekly in Darwin to continue checking the first draft of Mark's gospel. Mally has since moved to Queensland. They had completed the details check – spelling, grammar, punctuation – up to Mark 13:8. Yungirrja has also been improving her skills through her studies with the Certificate II in Indigenous Translating course. She hoped to complete checking the rest of Mark's gospel on a visit to Galiwin'ku. However, those plans have been stalled due to the repairs required on the dialysis unit in Galiwin'ku, which she is now dependent on.

Prayer for Yungirrja and her helpers to find a way to complete the draft of the final chapters of Mark's Gospel in Warramiri.

GUPAPUYDU: Dalambirra, Bruce and Glenys Waters write: In February, Bruce completed the back translation of Luke and he and Dalambirra did the final check. Recently Bruce did the needed adjustments to the back translation and submitted Luke for its consultant check. Since February Dalambirra has been drafting the book of Genesis and in September she completed the Certificate II in Indigenous Translating through Nungalinya College. Meanwhile Bruce completed back translations for John, and 1&2 Peter. We had hoped to meet in October to do the final check of these books but Dalambirra has been quite unwell. Meanwhile Bruce continues work on the back translation of 1 Thessalonians.

Prayer for wisdom for Dalambirra facing decisions about treatment options.

Praise God for the many Yolŋu students who have taken up Certificate II in Indigenous Translating at Nungalinya College. Pray also for a new generation of Yolŋu Bible translators to respond to God's call.

DHUWA DHADU'MI AND WANGURRI: Djawut, Yurranjdjil and Margaret

A mini-workshop was held for two Yolŋu projects; Wangurri and Dhuwa Dhanu'mi at Dharrwar, a homeland 40 mins drive north of Galiwin'ku, Elcho Island. The peaceful surroundings and support of those living in the homeland made for a beautiful setting where they could be away from the distractions of 'town life'. We even had a special 'outback office' set up to work in! Djawut went straight into the continuation of drafting the book of Acts into Dhuwa Dhanu'mi, whilst Yurranjdjil pursued John's Gospel in Wangurri independently. Yurranjdjil was inspired by some of the content presented at the February workshop, and has now begun exploring a special Wangurri word as possibly one of the names of God, that her father had shared with her many years ago.

Prayer for the health and strength of each of the Coordinate Bible translators and their helpers as they make effort to focus on their Scripture projects in the midst of life's daily distractions.



Many Hands Make Light Work



Testament is complete, but it has not been available digitally until a team from Mission Assist UK re-typed everything twice and ran a comparison check between their typed versions to remove any inconsistencies. Now Mayalil has worked with Jenny at AuSIL to run Paratext consistency checks to catch any places where the spelling hasn't yet been standardised. As Mayalil reads verse after verse of the Gumatj Old Testament, she often comments on the beauty and naturalness of the language. She has enjoyed noting down words that are starting to fall out of regular usage so that she can continue to use them with her fellow Gumatj speakers and teach them to the next generation.

Together they have now finished the consistency checks after a second workshop held in October, back at the AuSIL office. The digital version will soon be up on YouVersion, and the community hope to prepare a reprint to be dedicated next year.

Prayer for the Dhuwaya and Gumatj projects.

DJAMBARRPUYDU

The Old Testament scripture project is going through a time of transition as older members of this team are working at handing over this project, particularly for the book of Ruth to a younger generation.

Prayer for a second 'Experienced Translators' Workshop to be held early in 2026, for the 11 language projects and their helpers. Pray that this will be an opportunity to study, translate, encourage and inspire one another in each of the Yolŋu Scripture projects and a strengthening of faith in Christ for each one involved.

Thank you for your partnership with us as we work together on Indigenous Scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit "For I know the plans I have for you", says the Lord, "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" Jeremiah 29:11

DHUWAYA / GUMATJ PROJECTS:
Lynette Wilson writes on the progress of two Scripture projects with Yolŋu translators; Faye Mayalil and Tanya, and Jenny Bradshaw of AuSIL:

In July, Mayalil and Tanya went to Darwin to work on an exegetical check of their draft of John 3-5 in Dhuwaya with Lynette at the AuSIL office. The team always enjoys reading back through Jesus' words. When they read in English that Jesus said, "You must be born again," it didn't sound particularly surprising. When we read back through the same passage in Dhuwaya, it came as quite a shock. Jesus' words are far more fresh and surprising when we hear them in the language we use everyday.

The team are also preparing for a reprint of the Gumatj Old Testament portions that were printed in the 1990's. Forty percent of the Gumatj Old



Bininj Kunwok Translation students complete block 2

By Louise Macdonald

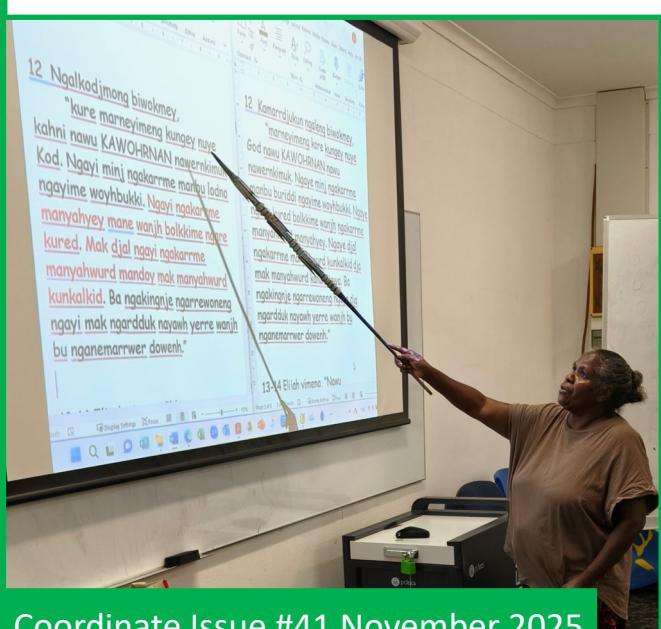


Nungalinya College was buzzing in September with two language groups in for their Certificate 2 in Indigenous Translation blocks. The Bininj Kunwok was a small lively group representing two West Arnhem languages, Kunwinjku and Kuninjku. Sandra Makurlju and myself facilitated two subjects: 'Meaningful, Accurate and Natural' which the

students translated as *mandjad* for accuracy and *kunwok kamak rowk* for naturalness, as well as 'Prepare to translate' which explored culture, ethics and principles.

The students started by exploring the passages where Jesus calls his disciples, which led to the production of a gorgeous mural with support from Sal and the Art centre at Nungalinya. As the students collaboratively worked on the mural there was constant discussion about the stories they were grappling with. One feature of the block was the discussion around how to translate 'the fig tree' that Nathaniel sits under. The green grocer in Darwin happened to have some figs for sale, and this was the first time any of the women had seen or tasted mediterranean figs. They tentatively approached the fruit, but once tasted "it's so sweet"! This led to grappling with which tree was the most appropriate to use. Their initial choice of the tree outside our classroom was discarded and instead they went for a large leafed tree outside their accommodation 'Nauclea Orientalis' or in Kunwok 'manmarrawahwah'. This became the focus of

the groups Chapel service, particularly exploring that the bark from this tree is used to make string to cover the body, a similar purpose for the large mediterranean fig leaves.

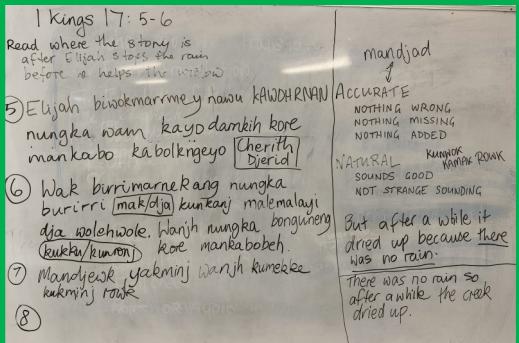


Bininj Kunwok Translation students complete block 2 continued

An outing next door, to the AusIL archives unearthed the original Kunwinjku song book which had songs translated by Leander's Aunty many years ago. We were able to learn how to back translate by preparing a song to present at Chapel with the English back translation.

The next passage to be explored was the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath

(1 Kings 17:5-16). With guidance from Sandra the group managed to draft and check the story in both their languages. The Bininj Kunwok language and Culture Centre graciously sent Del Hunter and Andy Pert to enable us to do Community Check and then Sam Freney from Bible Society zoomed in from Vanuatu to facilitate a Bible consultant check. The passage is now uploaded to the Australian Bibles website [1 Kings 17:8 \(gupk\)](#).



We are grateful for the help provided by Lachlan Webb, Fr Mark Woloszien and Mark Holt with their teaching of Greek and Hebrew skills. Thanks to Father Mark and his family the students were treated to a cross cultural experience as part of their exploration of culture—we all attended the Serbian Orthodox

Church in Malak and experienced a liturgy for John the Baptist, partly in Serbian. Marilyn exited the Church saying heartily 'Kamak church' (good church). In good Orthodox style the students followed worship with a feast of 'manimunak' (magpie geese). The students will be returning in 2026 to complete their certificate.



Translating the Bible Together in Maningrida

By Anne Spragg



Mawng team travelling from Warruwi Goulburn Island



Sandra Rosemary Daisy and Nancy working in Mawng



In the second half of this year, two Bible translation workshops were held in Maningrida, bringing together translators from five different language groups. Across both workshops, we saw the growing confidence and enthusiasm of local translators as they worked to bring Scripture into their own languages.

The first workshop took place in June and focused on ongoing translation work in three languages: Burarra, Kuninjku, and Mawng. These translators already had years of experience and were glad to set aside dedicated time to continue translating key Bible passages. It was a productive and encouraging week, as participants reflected deeply on God's word and made continued progress on their translations.

Translating the Bible Together continued.

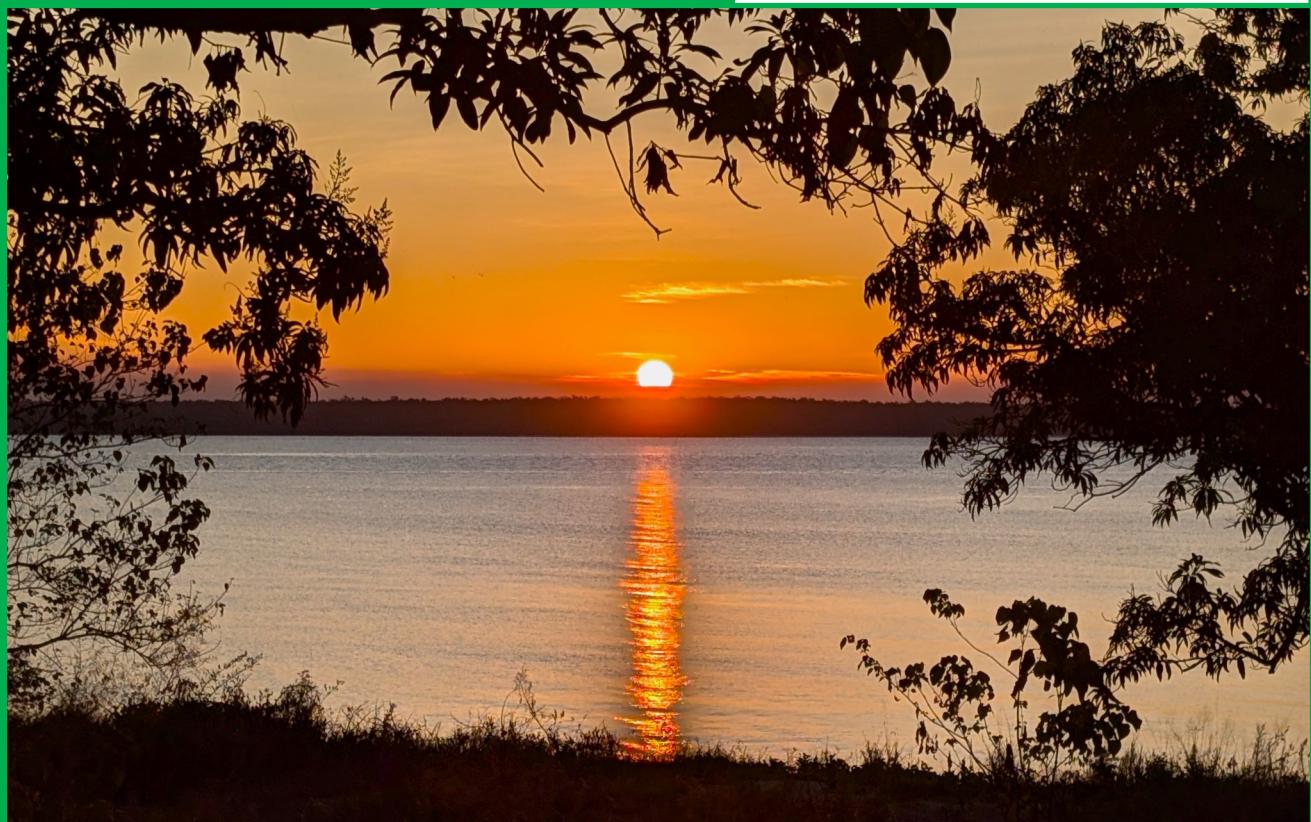


Experienced Burarra team at work, Indra Rosemary and George



Kuninjku team at work

In September, a second workshop brought together emerging translators from the Ndjébbana and Nakara language groups — both groups attended the November workshop in Darwin last year. This workshop focused on building translation skills and confidence, following the complete translation process in one week. Together, the teams translated the story of Jesus calming the storm from Mark 4:35–4. Because some of the participants speak both languages, the groups chose to work closely together, supporting one another throughout the process. By the end of the week, both language groups had completed and checked a full Bible story they could share with their communities.



Translating the Bible Together

continued.



These workshops also highlighted the unique linguistic diversity in and around Maningrida. All three languages from the June workshop are spoken within 100 kilometres of each other, yet they each belong to different language families. For comparison, the Indo-European language family — which includes English — stretches across much of Europe and into parts of South Asia, including India. Similarly, even though Ndjébbana and Nakara come from the same language family, they aren't mutually intelligible and share very little vocabulary. This was clear during the September workshop, as the two groups worked on translating the same Bible story. Despite the shared theme, the translations were quite different, reflecting the distinct structure and vocabulary of each language.

Translation work like this not only makes Scripture more accessible — it allows people to hear and understand God's word in the language they know best, the language they speak at home and in their community. For many, it's the first time they've encountered these stories in their own words, which can bring deeper understanding and a stronger personal connection to the message. It also affirms the value of each language and culture. For the translators involved, it was encouraging to see their work come together and to be part of something that speaks directly to their communities in a meaningful and familiar way. These workshops have shown just how valuable it is to create more opportunities for translation work to continue in Maningrida — building skills, encouraging collaboration, and helping more people engage with Scripture in their own language.



Vale Rev David Mirrawana and his legacy

By Katie Cooper

How wonderful it is to see a messenger coming across the mountains bringing good news of peace. (Isaiah 52:7)

The first people who brought the good news to us at Maningrida was Gowan Armstrong and his wife Shirley, Kathy and Dave Glasgow and Bob Cross and his wife Heather. They came to Maningrida in 1962.

There was no church building, only a shelter made of coconut leaves. People came together to worship, sharing and encouraging one another. These people came from different language groups; Njébena, Nakara, An-burra, Gunartpa, Kuninjku and Burarra. The message spread out over the country. One day two people went fishing at Judah Point and God showed them a beautiful stone. That stone was a sign of faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.

Bob Cross was a builder and his workers from Maningrida were building houses including the church. When they finished Gowan Armstrong moved in and the people placed the valuable stone at the church where it stands to this day. There was a men and women's choir group, pastors and leaders. They used to have Sunday worship, Bible study and prayer meetings at the new church.

Kathy and Dave Glasgow were Bible translators. They didn't have a house so they stayed with the Gunartpa people. They had a shelter to live in and they started to translate in Gunartpa then Burarra and An-burra with local translators. There were 600 people who translated in the different languages until we made an agreement to translate only in Burarra.

1 Peter chapter 2 talks about the living stone and the holy nation; the living stone rejected by the people as worthless but chosen by God as valuable which was placed as a cornerstone in Zion or Maningrida. Jesus is the living cornerstone and used local Christians in building the spiritual temple at Maningrida. This is how the Word came to Maningrida.

Three pastors heard the Word of God. They accepted Jesus as their saviour and kept his word in their hearts. They started their ministry, spreading the Word of God through all the areas around Maningrida. They struggled and suffered through stress, pain, sickness, worry and loneliness but they continued doing cross dedications, bible study, funerals in the community and homelands, prayer meetings and fellowship until their death. They are gone and have left us. Who will take their place?

Rev. Raymond Bandicha: ordained 13/3/1986 – died 5/3/2008

Rev. Dudley Cooper: ordained 22/7/1989 – died 2001

Rev. David Mirrawana: commissioned as community minister 1999, ordained 1/11/2024 –
died 24/12/2024. (Permission given to print names but not photos)



Thankyou to our supporters

In recognition of our many and varied readers, here are some of the churches that have followed us with support, prayer and interest for many years and we say thankyou. This newsletter has a print run of 500 so this is just a sample of the many that continue to be interested in our work—Thankyou.



Manigrida and West Arnhem translators



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