

**Miss Zara Francisco
Aboriginal Education Teacher
and Wil Avery, College Captain
reflect on their experiences of
Aboriginal Education
at St Joseph's College Lochinvar.**



ZARA

Good morning Elders, special guests and dignitaries, members of the College Executive, parents, staff and students.

Looking back to 2016, when I took on the role of Aboriginal Education teacher at St Joseph's College, if I had been told that within four years! we would double the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled at the college, gain another Aboriginal Education Teacher in Mr Hales, and be opening our very own Aboriginal Education Centre, I would simply not have believed it. I am so proud of how far our school has come in the quest to support our Aboriginal students to the very best of our ability.

Obviously this position would not have occurred without a whole school approach, as Aboriginal Education teachers cannot undertake this journey alone. After all, Aboriginal Education must be everybody's business. It all starts with a leadership team focussed on creating a culturally competent school and putting it at the forefront of its agenda, as well as our fellow staff members committing to this priority with genuine enthusiasm.

The facilities which we will officially open today, are impressive to say the least. It is obvious that our students are enthralled, as the frequency in which the space is being used for school work, seeking wellbeing support, building on their cultural knowledge, and as a space for them to just authentically be themselves, amongst their fellow brother and sisters, continues to build.

Year after the year it is wonderful to see the St Joseph's students who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, grow in their capacity to own their culture – with sheer pride, dignity and confidence. The students who, at the commencement of their educational journey may not have wanted to own their identity, now choose to proudly identify amongst peers and staff, and they continue to grow and thrive in this crucial aspect of their life. It is this sense of belonging that we have created here at St Joseph's that not only makes me proud to be an Aboriginal woman, but proud to say that I work here in this fantastic community.

It is the responsibility of each of us to continue the legacy of the Sister of St Joseph's, to always stand in solidarity with our First Nations people and to strive for continued reconciliation through action. I know in my heart that we are well on our way in this aim here at St Joseph's College Lochinvar.

WIL:

Good morning Elders, special guests and dignitaries, members of the College Executive Team, parents, staff and most importantly St Joseph's students.

As a proud Aboriginal student of St Joseph's Lochinvar, it is my pleasure to have the opportunity to address you today. If I reflect back to when I first started my educational journey here at the college, I am amazed at how far I have come – not only in my learning, but in my cultural knowledge and understanding of myself as a Wonnarua man. Being a part of our Aboriginal group and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group has shaped my behaviour and belief in myself, to the point where I am proudly a College Captain.

I cannot believe how many proud Aboriginal students we have at the College and I truly believe that this will continue to grow in strength. The support for us as Aboriginal students has improved immensely. I feel that the support that we receive for our study and wellbeing, as well as the implementation of personalised learning plans has really made a difference to my learning and has encouraged me take hold of my dreams and know that I have the power to make them a reality.

Embarking on the HSC has been a new and somewhat daunting experience. Sometimes it is difficult to know where to turn. As an Aboriginal student, I know that I always have Miss Francisco and Mr Hales to turn to for absolutely anything I may need. Be it helping shape a study routine, navigate the complexities of assessment tasks, or simply needing that boost of confidence to reach the next level.

Our Aboriginal family here at St Joseph's is one that we as students can fall back on to talk about any situation. It might be that there is something holding us down from being our best self and with our group, there is a welcoming place that we can go to overcome this lack of confidence. With the opening of the Yalawa Centre we now have wonderful facilities for a range of academic, wellbeing and cultural support.