

Craig McVee, Chairperson, Kojonup Aboriginal Corporation
The Kodja Place Opening Ceremony
29 September 2002

His Excellency The Governor Lieutenant General John Sanderson, Mrs Sanderson, Noongar Elders, ATSIC Regional Chairperson Mr David Williams, Shire President John Charlesworth, Mrs Charlesworth, fellow Noongar people and invited guests, ladies & gentlemen.

On behalf of the local Noongar people Welcome to Kodja Place.

It is with a great feeling of pride and privilege for me to stand before you today representing the local Noongar community.

We the Noongar people are the traditional custodians of this land. It gave us our culture, spirit, soul and beliefs.

We now have come out of the back street corners where the 'out of sight' - 'out of mind' motto existed.

In the very early stages of this project the Wadjela's involved, by way of not wanting to upset anyone and trying to do the right thing asked if we preferred to display and showcase our Noongar history and culture separately. But as a group we decided that to move forward as 'True Australians' we would tell our story alongside that of the Wadjela's. Thus 'One Story Many Voices'.

With the many hours of research done by volunteers on behalf of the Noongar community, I was amazed at the astonishment of these Wadjela people as they were discovering for the first time the Government policies and procedures which were enforced on Noongar people. That along with both stories intertwining throughout the displays tells me that this complex is a very unique reconciliation project.

Now with the opening of this magnificent complex we will take you the visitor on a journey of the real life experiences, which have and still effect Noongar people today. However, this complex is not about laying blame but more about acknowledging what has happened so that we can all move on as true Australians.

We will also give you an insight into how today's Noongar people have developed and progressed into a modern society whilst still maintaining strong links to their culture.

The development of Kodja Place has given us the local Noongar community an opportunity to be involved in employment and business that in many small rural towns would be near impossible if you were a Wadjela, let alone a Noongar.

This, along with the friendships which have been formed, are undoubtedly the most positive outcomes of the whole project.

We currently have five Noongar trainees employed through a combination of Aboriginal funding agencies. This alone has lifted the self-esteem and confidence of the individuals to the extent that we can now tell where they are by listening for the sound of their singing.

With this complex, we the people of Kojonup have been given the opportunities to create and become a showcase and role model for all other Noongar and Wadjela communities.

I would like to acknowledge the huge amount of support given to myself and to the local Noongars by a large number of people, but would like to give my personal thank you to a very special lady, Mrs Glenys Russell.

This complex will not be referred to as 'my place', it will not be referred to as 'your place' but it will definitely be referred to as 'OUR PLACE'

Thank you
