



Beyond the hangar

The story of MAF in Arnhem Land goes back over 40 years. It's a story of working alongside the local indigenous people, the Yolngu, as they come to terms with a new order of things whilst trying to keep their old values and way of life intact. It's not always an easy path and the Yolngu need people they can trust. Many Yolngu will tell you that they trust MAF and this is because of the men and women who over the years have been a part of MAF, and who have provided a great deal of help where it has been needed.



Some of this trust has been earned in the Homelands whenever the pilots of MAF come, either carrying passengers and freight or at other times when they go in outreach. And whilst MAF pilots and families are well known in the outside communities, there is also another equally valuable group, and without them MAF would be unable to function. It is said that behind every successful man there is a woman, and behind every successful pilot there is an engineer. A lot of the time you won't hear about them and the work they do, because spending your time in the bowels of engine or airframe doesn't immediately speak glamour! However as a group they are just as skilled and trained as the pilots who fly the planes, and just as necessary.



You won't find the engineers usually out in the Homelands either, because of the necessity to be located close to the maintenance hangar. The Engineering team are here though with a big sense of Mission. Most of them live in the indigenous community of Yirrkala, about 15 km from the mining town of Nhulunbuy – the main town in Arnhem Land. This has been an MAF strategy in order for them to live in community and involve themselves with the life of the people they care about, and who need all the help they can get.



Take for example John. When he is not toting a spanner, he can be found in the local church where he has a huge input into the worship. In addition there are the music practices he runs where Yolngu are encouraged to develop their music abilities and to grow in their own way towards a greater understanding of themselves and worship. And if he is not doing that then he can also be found giving valued spiritual input into individuals' lives. Talk to the community in Yirrkala and you will hear of a man and his family who are highly valued and trusted and who have made a solid and lasting connection with the people.

Or there is David from PNG who carries a dream to have a Yolngu engineering apprentice. The locals see his country as having many of the same values as themselves and have taken to him and his family in a big way. David is involved with local church, men's fellowship and ministry, while his wife is just as involved with the ladies. And not only are they involved in church, but also in solving the problems of the local community. Yirrkala reflects the problems that have beset the Yolngu as they grapple with an alien culture. The impact it has had on their traditional values has made the way ahead rough at times, but it's in those times you will often find David helping to sort out issues and giving valued input. They are a family that are respected and trusted in the community, and that is of immense worth.



MAF is in Arnhem Land to provide aviation to the communities but also to bring the gospel in a very real and practical hands-on manner. When it does it is often an engineer leading the way, unsung but with a vital contribution to the work of MAF in Arnhem Land.

