Biography
MICHAEL IAN MIGGO WOODLEY
Born 1972, Roebourne, WA

Yindjibarndi spokesman, Birdarra Law carrier, community leader
Executive Officer Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation
Executive Officer Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation

Mr Woodley lives with partner, Lorraine Coppin, and their 6 children, in Roebourne, Western Australia.

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HISTORY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

1. Michael Woodley's leadership has a history of more than a decade in the Yindjibarndi community, and more generally in the community of Roebourne. The facts of Michael's biography and achievement both in terms of community service and parenting speak for themselves.

2. In 1993 Mr Woodley took up training through Rio Tinto's Aboriginal Training and Liaison (ATAL) division and graduated to their workforce, serving for five years. Woodley became one of the star recruits of ATAL and was featured in their promotional literature as an exemplar of Rio's Indigenous training and employment accomplishments.

3. Mr Woodley career then shifted into community development with his move to, and management of the Ngarrawaana Community in the Yindjibarndi tablelands. The years he served with
Ngurrawaana saw a growth in resident numbers and community improvements, and the inauguration, with his partner Lorraine Coppin, of the Yindjibarndi cultural recording and archiving project.


5. Juluwarlu was the first truly endemic and sustained cultural maintenance and production project in Roebourne.

6. From 2002-11, Mr Woodley as CEO, in partnership with many other individuals and organizations, developed JAC from a small scale, subsistence-funded (CDEP), cultural recording organization, into a thriving archiving, publishing, digital media, television broadcasting, media training, cultural consultancy, and advocacy enterprise.

7. Mr Woodley’s leadership and management involved recruitment of both indigenous and non-indigenous specialists and professional staff; the inauguration of a training program (TAFE accredited) for local indigenous people interested learning Information Technology and media skills; extensive fieldwork research and cultural recording; Yindjibarndi language development projects; the building of a media production centre and consolidation of in-house production; attainment of an Indigenous Open Narrow Cast television license and commencement of broadcast; development of a local radio broadcasting facility; book publication; consolidation of a physical archive and installation of a digital archive interface; expansion into consultancy and fee for service work within and beyond the local community; and robust engagement with resources corporations and other institutions in both prosecuting Yindjibarndi rights and seeking business partnership and financial support.

8. After more than a decade of effort, the Yindjibarndi cultural archive today holds thousands of articles including maps and documents, reports and dissertations, historical photographs and family snaps, books, genealogical charts, anthropological and archaeological papers, maps, artefacts, and hundreds of hours of both archival and original video and sound recordings.

9. Archival materials have been redeemed from linguists, anthropologists, former teachers, pastoralists, community welfare officers, policemen, business people, filmmakers, libraries, museums, Indigenous affairs bodies and other institutional databases, and so on.

10. The immense achievement of the organization in which Mr Woodley continues to serve as the Chief Executive Officer, includes the production of over fifty community video productions that have covered subjects as diverse as cultural and genealogical history, creation mythology, language, the fauna and flora of Yindjibarndi country, domestic violence, substance abuse, local history, health, traditional foods, traditions of hunting and gathering, eulogies for the deceased, customary Law and traditions of Respect, native title heritage clearance surveys, presentations to the National Native Title Tribunal, youth leadership, and current affairs.

11. Most particularly, Mr Woodley has been pivotal in organising a series of cultural fieldwork projects that have taken his elders and their extended families into all quarters of Yindjibarndi country to document their knowledge and history of association. The records made on these trips are unprecedented in their scope and of inestimable value, not to just the Yindjibarndi, but all Australians who value and wish to share in knowledge that speaks of Yindjibarndi country and Indigenous experience of it over many generations.

12. JAC’s Open Narrow Cast (ONC) television license (awarded in July 2005), dubbed NTV (Ngaarda Television), broadcasts local content directly, and relays the National Indigenous Television (NITV) during week days, and Indigenous Community Television (ICTV) during weekends and to a population of about 6000 people not just in Roebourne, but also in Wickham, Point Samson, Cossack, the Roebourne Regional Prison and several satellite communities.
13. Ngaarda Radio broadcasts several locally presented Indigenous and Maori programs, and rebroadcasts the National Radio Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) to local communities.

14. JAC has undertaken commissioned and corporate, or ‘fee for service’ media work for clients including Marnda Mia Central Negotiating Committee (CNC), Rio Tinto Iron Ore, Woodside Energy, Ngaarda Civil & Mining, Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation, Yandina Family Care Centre, Mawurndhara Aboriginal Medical Service, Department of Water, Roebourne Hospital, and the Shire of Roebourne.

15. From 2005 and 2006 JAC managed the Community Consultancy and Feasibility Study for the NYFL Cultural Centre project; and in 2006-08 JAC held the contract to manage the Waraganugardi Yirdiyabura – Pathways to Employment Program for NYFL.

16. JAC has also undertaken cross cultural awareness training for government and private sector including: Woodside, Victoria Hotel/Motel, Department of Conservation and Land Management and Pilbara Native Title Service.


18. In 2007 Mr Woodley was also appointed as CEO of the Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation (YAC). The responsibilities of this position encompassed every aspect of the management of Yindjibarndi Native Title business in providing secretariat, policy and research services that informed Yindjibarndi’s forward strategy; heritage management; coordination of negotiations with developers/disturbance proponents; and retaining professional legal and anthropological services as required. http://yindjibarndi.org.au/yindjibarndi/

19. Mr Woodley’s role as CEO of JAC and YAC have been reconfirmed by overwhelming majority at every AGM since he assumed these positions in 2001 and 2007 respectively.

20. In 2009 JAC was elected by the satellite Yindjibarndi communities of Ngurrawaana and Cheeditha to act as their auspice administrative body. This alliance, encompassing YAC, Juluwarlu, Cheeditha and Ngurrawaana, unites the most significant and long-lived Yindjibarndi organisations, and represents a strong record of achievement with minimal resources. Major community development projects centred on Cheeditha and Ngurrawaana await increased capacity within YAC, and injection of greater investment.

21. Mr Woodley has also served as an elected regional councilor to the ATSIC Ngaarda Ngarli Yarndu board where he received important training in matters of governance, the function of community politics and the exercise of leadership on a broader, more exposed stage.

22. Woodley’s experience at ATSIC led to his service as board member and chair of Roebourne CDEP and Chair of the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation (NYFL).

23. Mr Woodley’s work of preserving and passing on the knowledge of his elders, and his efforts to provide opportunities to youth in both secular and cultural training & education has earned him the respect of many sections of his community. He has provided a dynamic role model for younger people in the Roebourne community.

24. In a wider, professional context, he has also won the acknowledgement and respect of archivists, museum workers, linguists, and anthropologists across Australia. For his good judgment, generosity and expertise, he is regularly consulted by academics and other experts working in cultural recording, archiving and cultural retrieval.
AWARDS & RECOGNITION

25. The JAC archive is acknowledged as the most significant of its kind in Western Australia by Greg Wallace, former Manager Museum Assistance Program, Western Australian Museum.

26. In mid-2007 archivist/librarian Jennifer Ford was contracted to map the extent of the archive and make recommendations for the consolidation and systematisation of cataloguing. In writing her report Ford remarked: “The Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation Archive is a collection of great significance to local Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and has state significance as one of few such archives in Western Australia and similar national importance, again as one of few such archives in Australia”. She went on to say that the work of Juluwarlu in sustaining the collection and recording of local cultural and social history was invaluable for recording and preserving an authentic history of Yindjibarndi traditional and contemporary life. She also observed that the most “effective and appropriate contemporary methods and media technology are used” in this work. 1

27. The recording work of JAC with Yindjibarndi elders was acknowledged in 2005 when its principal cultural workers, Ned Cheedy and his wife Cherry, were honoured with the Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre Individual Contribution to Pilbara Aboriginal Language Maintenance and Promotion award for their work with Juluwarlu in gathering and transmission of knowledge. 1

28. Juluwarlu was also honoured with the Wangka Maya award for Promotion of Pilbara Aboriginal Languages Through Media for publishing three books and recording close to 100 hours of video with elders, and for establishing Ngaarda Television.

29. In 2006 Juluwarlu was awarded first place in the Federal Minister’s Award for Excellence for an Employer of Australian Apprentices for the North Western Australia Region. Juluwarlu was awarded this prize ahead of other contenders like Rio Tinto and Goolarri Media Enterprises, and was the only Indigenous winner at the awards presentation in Sydney. (Also notable was the fact that there were no other media-centred business in the inventory of winners from other regions around the country).

30. In October 2006 JAC screened 15 of their video productions at the 8th National Remote Indigenous Media Festival at Wirrimanu (Balgo) and won several awards, including Best Language & Culture Video (for Wanggamarra), Best Promotional Video (for Kicking the Can), and Best Emerging Female Talent (Tenellia Lockyer). In 2009 Juluwarlu won the award for Best Documentary (for Juluwarlu Journey) and in 2011 was again awarded again with Best Hunting, Cooking & Bush Food Award (for Spinifex Fishing), and Best Student Video award (for Money Hole). In 2010 Mr Woodley co-directed “BirndiWirndi” (meaning ‘Worlds Apart’) with artist in residence at the Juluwarlu, Sohan Ariel Hayes, which was projected on to the facade of the old Victoria Hotel; and in 2011 he produced the dramatised documentary “Two Worlds”, for the ABC-TV series Deadly Yarns, which also screened in the nationally toured Message Sticks Festival.

31. Juluwarlu’s achievements so impressed the State’s screen development and support agency, Screen West, that they sponsored Juluwarlu to conduct a workshop (dubbed Capturing Community Stories) for Indigenous people from around the state who wished to utilize media in promulgating their culture. After the workshop Screen West’s online news bulletin noted: “The Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation is being acknowledged as Western Australia’s, and possibly Australia’s, leading centre for gathering Indigenous oral culture with digital image and archiving”. 2

32. In 2006 Michael Woodley was awarded a Western Australian 40Under40 Business Award for his achievements in business leadership at Juluwarlu. This is an annual award to 40 business people under the age of 40 in WA. Woodley was the only Indigenous recipient in 2006. One of the 40Under40 judges, business development manager for the North West Shelf, Daniel Bathe, commented: “I happened to visit Roebourne while on business in Karratha the week after the
awards and I was able to see what Michael is doing—he’s certainly trying to make a difference in extremely challenging circumstances”.

33. In 2011, upon his nomination by JAC for his dedicated cultural recording work for Juluwarlu and the Yindjibarndi people over a decade, Yindjibarndi elder, 105 year old Ned Cheedy, was awarded the most prestigious national NAIDOC prize, the Lifetime Achievement Award.

THE RARE DISTINCTION OF LOCAL MANAGEMENT

34. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma observed: “You can look at any community, and there's very few around where you have Indigenous people managing those communities that are the CEOs of the communities or administrators of communities. Most often, it's a non-Indigenous person there”.

35. Among the principal Indigenous organisations in Roebourne, Juluwarlu and YAC are the only two in the fortunate position of having executive day-to-day management comprised of local, long-serving Indigenous leadership. As a result both of these organisations have been spared the destabilising effect of executive-officer churn, which see organisations falter from one passing CEO to the next.

LAW & CULTURE

36. The significance of Juluwarlu’s and Mr Woodley’s work becomes especially significant when one considers that most of the Law and culture carriers of the 1990s held grave fears that younger generations did not have the wherewithal to carry through their knowledge and traditions, and that these traditions would die with their own passing.

37. Mr Woodley belongs to a select cadre of his generation who do not drink, have held down jobs, and have kept the flame of their cultural identity burning— who have straddled the chasm between the elders dating from before mining development and drinking rights to contemporary generations who have matured to pick up the pieces— just in time.

38. Woodley consistently acknowledges the mentorship, instruction and leadership-training he received from the most senior custodians of Yindjibarndi Law and culture.

39. The elders who instructed Michael Woodley in the Birdarra Law, and who gave example and imbued ‘feeling’ to him include: Allan Jacob, his grandfather Woodley King, Johnny Walker, Yilbi Warrie, Kenny Jerrold, Alec Ned, Darcy Hubert, Roger Solomon, and above all, Ned Cheedy—who has steadily worked with Juluwarlu to make an unmatched record of Yindjibarndi country and culture. Women who played a part in his education include Yali King, Mabel Albert, Polly Churnside, Nita Fishook, Elsie Adams, Cherry Cheedy, Dora Solomon, Bridget Warrie, and Yiirdi Whalebone.

40. Woodley’s work for Birdarra Law over the years saw him become a key figure in organising ceremony, particularly dancers in the bush. He brought his own distinctive influence to this task by striving to provide opportunity for others to emerge from under the shroud of a difficult history.

41. The ‘missing link’ generation are those children who saw drinking rights engulf the Old Reserve in 1967; who were around the age of puberty when the second wave of mining development hit in the early 1970s; who were consequently caught in the cultural rip of the late sixties and early seventies; and who died young or failed to take up the baton for Law and culture from the generation of their fathers.

42. The phenomenon of the ‘missing link’ was the stigmatic precursor of Woodley’s acceptance of leadership responsibility in his community because enormous responsability fell to his generation to
pick up the pieces and to straddle cultural breaks that opened with the deaths of his grandfathers and grandmothers in the 1990s. As a younger Lawman, Mr Woodley promoted the practice of passing Law ‘up’ to the previous ‘missing link’ generation.

43. Enormously significant is the fact that, of his generation, Mr Woodley is the sole carrier of Yindjibarndi jawi (dreaming) and jalurra (dance) songs. In fact, along with Ned Mayinbungu Cheedy, who is of his grandfather’s generation, Mr Woodley is the only Yindjibarndi person who publicly performs these songs. In particular, Mr Woodley now carries the songs of Tommy Wiliwuru Bambardu (the blind one), the most celebrated of the Yindjibarndi jawi dreamers. On 6 September Mr Woodley sang many of these songs for the spectacular celebration dance ceremony held for Ned Cheedy on the occasion of his 2011 NAIDOC Lifetime Achievement Award.


44. The complex, severely disadvantaged socio-cultural environment Mr Woodley was born into and now works in has inevitably given rise to immense challenges. These are largely explained by a local history that reflects deep-seated inter-generational psychological distress, and which devolves from Roebourne’s troubled experience in the face of dislocation from country, dismissal from the pastoral stations, ghettoisation in the Roebourne Reserve, ‘drinking rights’, poor delivery of education and health services, traumatisation by the mining boom of the late 1960s and 70s, and so on. These stresses have been routinely expressed in a chronicle of substance abuse, death and violence, and recrimination thrown up by trauma. To his credit, Mr Woodley has shown immense resilience and maturity in tackling these challenges, and rescuing significant successes for his people from them.

1 Ford, Jennifer, Archive Statement of Significance, 2007
3 Trunkline, Woodside Energy Limited magazine: Michael’s already a winner, Q2 2006