

MIRIMA DAWANG WOORLAB-GERRING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE CENTRE, KUNUNURRA

Photographer: Darren Clark

The Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre, Kununurra.

On my recent trip to the East Kimberley I found myself living and working in the community of Kununurra with the Miriwoong & Gajirrabeng community who were the original inhabitants of this region.

Over a two-month period I worked closely with the Warringarri Aboriginal Arts Centre, and the Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre, together these two centres are the heart and soul of Kununurra's indigenous community.

I began working with the Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre recording how they were sharing the knowledge that they had collected over the years with the community of Kununurra. Miriwoong was once a vibrant language, spoken widely and lived especially through Dreamtime stories and songlines. Traditionally the elders used language to teach the lore, cultural traditions and practices, and how to look after country. Hence the knowledge, philosophies and wisdoms of the Miriwoong & Gajirrabeng ancient culture can only be truly explained and understood through the language that was used for thousands of years to teach them.

At MDWg, they have established successful and innovative programs based on internationally renowned learning models for endangered languages. These programs emphasise intergenerational learning so that the knowledge of elders is effectively transferred down to the youngest generations. The most successful program, the Miriwoong Language Nest, was based on a model developed by the Māori people in New Zealand and uses simple song, talk and play to immerse children in the language. This program is one of the first to operate for indigenous languages in Australia, growing from a small pilot in 2013 to now be regularly teaching Miriwoong to more than 300 children a week – both indigenous and non-indigenous.

Each day Peter Mac who is running the Language nest with a group of dedicated indigenous woman from the community head out to

visit a number of Pre-schools, Primary schools and the Kununurra High School teaching students the Mirriwoong language through songs, visual picture and word association. It was so inspiring watching the children respond to these lessons in such a positive way especially at the primary schools who knew all of the songs off by heart.

I also sat in on a number of meetings of the Knowledge Cycle as they discussed issues concerning the education and wellbeing of the Kununurra indigenous community, during these meetings I met Buttons Jones who is the head Miriwoong elder of the Kununurra community and Frances Kofod who was responsible for starting the knowledge centre. These people had a big influence on my ways of seeing and interacting with the Kununurra community. Aboriginal culture has not been lost- just disrupted. Their ways of knowing, being, doing, valuing and learning remain in an ancestral framework of knowledge that is still strong. There is a spirit of learning in their words, they find it in the language structure, in the way things are repeated and come around in a circle, they show you how they think and use information. The patterns in stories, phrases, songs, kinship and even in the land can show us the spirit of learning that lives in the culture.

IMAGE NO.	CAPTION	FORMAT	DATE	COMMENTS
BA2840/79	Frances Kofod founder of the Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language & Culture Centre conducting the Mirima Knowledge Cycle 3 May 2017	Digital	3 May 2017	The meetings of the Knowledge Cycle at the Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language & Culture Centre were extremely interesting to attend due to the fact that all issue concerning the Kununurra community were being discussed in an open and honest manner, this knowledge then allowed me to record the community in a more insightful way.
BA2840/80	Senior Kununurra elder Buttons Jones at the Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language & Culture Centre 3 May 2017	Digital	3 May 2017	I found Buttons Jones to be a really beautiful person to be around, he was always laughing and singing and keen for a chat.
BA2840/81	Senator Pat Dodson with the staff at the Mirima Dawang	Digital	16 May 2017	The afternoon that this image

	Woorlab-gerring Language & Culture centre 16 May 2017			was made Pat Dodson was visiting Kununurra on a fact finding visit to try and find out if the White Card which quarantines money each week from the welfare payments was working, along with this he was meeting elders from the community such as Buttons Jones to discuss any local issues concerning the Indigenous community of Kununurra.
BA2840/82	Frances Kofod recording the Miriwoong language with Senior elders from the Kununurra community Buttons Jones & David Newry 3 May 2017	Digital	3 May 2017	Frances Koford is a Linguist who has been working around the Kununurra community for over 30 years now, her passion for documenting the Miriwoong language and setting up the Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language & Culture centre is the reason why this beautiful language is still being spoken today. In my eyes she is a living legend.
BA2840/83	Frances Kofod recording the boys from Yehaa Kununurra 10 May 2017	Digital	10 May 2017	Watching Frances at work in the field recording all aspects of Miriwoong culture was for me an inspiring moment, she has been doing this for over 30 years and her passion and thrust for knowledge is still as strong as ever.

BA2840/84	Head elder of the Kununurra community Buttons Jones at his home in Mirima 3 May 2017	Digital	3 May 2017	I was invited around to Button's house just out of town in the housing commission estate of Mirima, we sat and talked about the old days when he was a Stockman working on cattle stations around the district, I found Button's to be a wealth of information on all subjects to do with the land and it's people.
BA2840/85	Head elder of the Kununurra Community Buttons Jones at his home in Mirima 3 May 2017	Digital	3 May 2017	Portrait of Button Jones
BA2840/86	Jimmy Paddy teaching the boys from the Yeehaa Ranch Miriwoong language at the Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language & Culture Centre 9 May 2017	Digital	9 May 2017	This image shows Jimmy Paddy teaching the Yeehaa boys the Miriwoong language at the centre , the Yeehaa boys are a group of 14 to 19 year old Indigenous boys who have slipped through the cracks of main stream education, they are now learning how to be stockman so as to be able to gain work on Cattle station throughout the Top End.
BA2840/87	Jimmy Paddy with the boys from the Yeehaa Ranch @ the Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language & Culture Centre 9 May 2017	Digital	9 May 2017	Jimmy Paddy with a group of young boys from the Yeehaa Ranch, all of these boys are super keen to learn the Miriwoong language and to be taught about their culture as a way of understanding who

				they are and where they are from.
BA2840/88	Members of the Miriwoong Language Nest Rita Boombi, Dianne Dingle, Rosemary Boombi, Barbara Gallagher, Rozanne Bilminga	Digital	15 May 2017	All five of these beautiful Ladies work tirelessly to educate to younger generation how to speak the Miriwoong language at the Pre schools, Primary Schools & the High School at Kununurra. To watch them all in action was inspiring they had such a positive effect on all who came into contact with them. The Miriwoong Language Nest is currently in its third formal year of operation, having started with children up to pre-primary age when they first began rolling out classes in 2014. They have followed that age group up each consecutive year since, and 300 students up to Year 2 level are now being taught by the program whose effects are being echoed throughout the community at large.
BA2840/89	Peter Mac and the ladies from the Miriwoong Language Nest teaching the Pre-primary school children @ St Josephs Parish School Kununurra 15 May 2017	Digital	15 May 2017	The children at St Josephs Parish Primary School really surprised me with they way they responded to the

				Language Nest class, they all replied to the questions asked using Miriwoong language and sang their hearts out. Starting with the earliest levels of education was a logical choice for the team who have based their model on research that suggests younger children are more receptive to language learning
BA2840/90	The Miriwoong Language Nest in action teaching pre-primary school children @ St Josephs Parish School Kununurra 15 May 2017	Digital	15 May 2017	The children at St Josephs Parish Primary School were being asked questions in the Miriwoong language and they answered back using the language. "They want to learn and I think they're proud too to learn [how to say] things around Kununurra in Miriwoong, and places in Miriwoong, they are learning. "
BA2840/91	Peter Mac from the Miriwoong Language Nest teaching children from the One Tree Education and Care Centre Kununurra 15 May 2017	Digital	15 May 2017	The children from the One Tree Education and Care Centre were being taught the names of different body parts in Miriwoong language using a Mister Potato Head doll.
BA2840/92	Rosemary Boombi from the Miriwoong Language Nest	Digital	15 May 2017	It was hands on for the children at the One Tree

	helping children from the One Tree Education & Care Centre to learn the Language. Kununurra 15 May 2017			Education & Care Centre as they assembled a Mister Potato Head doll using the Miriwoong language as they went.
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