

JWS attends Warlpiri ancestor burial ceremony in Yuendumu, Northern Territory

In late November 2023, JWS was invited by Tin Truck Consulting (Tin Truck), to attend a funeral ceremony in Yuendumu, Northern Territory to welcome home a Warlpiri ancestor's remains, which had been repatriated from South Australia.

Tin Truck provides consulting services to promote and ensure Indigenous grassroots and community voices are heard and accounted for.

In connection with JWS's pro bono engagement by Tin Truck, JWS was invited by our client and Warlpiri leaders to attend a reburial ceremony in Yuendumu as an opportunity for JWS to further develop a relationship with the community and to meet community leaders at an event that would be of significance to the Warlpiri people.

Martin Kudnig (Partner) and Claudia Scardigno (Senior Associate), who have been working with Tin Truck, attended the ceremony on behalf of JWS. They were hosted by Glendle Schrader, Scott McConnell and Louise Wellington of Tin Truck.



ABORIGINAL HERITAGE AND REPATRIATION

Yuendumu, which was established as a government ration station and mission in 1946, had attracted anthropologists who wanted to learn from the Warlpiri people. Human remains and significant artefacts were taken from the community during this time and the community-led Warlpiri Project is now working to repatriate those remains and sacred artefacts so that they can be returned to the community.

It is understood that the ancestor's remains which were returned to Yuendumu last week had been passed on by missionaries in the 1960s to staff at the University of Adelaide's Dental School who had been conducting a dental study of Warlpiri people.

YUENDUMU CEREMONY



Upon arrival to Yuendumu - about 300 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs, on the edge of the Tanami Desert - Martin, who was accompanied by a Senior Warlpiri Elder, Robin Japanangka Granites, was taken as part of 'mens business' to observe the male Elders and other community leaders prepare for the ceremony. The men

prepared themselves by painting their bodies with ochre and knitted head pieces. It was here that Martin was particularly impressed to learn about the community's strong Collingwood Football Club fan base!



Representatives from the South Australian Museum and the Dean and Head of School at Adelaide Dental School - University of Adelaide also spoke about the importance of repatriation as part of reconciliation for museums and institutions.



Following the funeral ceremony, the ancestor's remains were taken to his final reburial at a closed ceremony near Pikilyi west of Yuendumu, where the men would camp out for the night.

Martin and Claudia were also invited to the Warlukurlangu Art Centre where Tin Truck gifted JWS a painting by the fourth generation painter, Athena Nangala Granites, depicting her interpretation of the Seven Sisters Dreaming which we are very much looking forward to hanging in the Melbourne office!



Men and women joined again for the ceremony, where the community congregated at Peace Park to witness the human remains being welcomed home. Each of the Elders had an opportunity to speak and the women performed funeral dances according to their skin groups. The children from Yuendumu School also performed songs. It was a joyful occasion and the Elders spoke in Warlpiri and English about uniting the community and the importance of family. It was striking to see the school children observe their Elders as they shared their language and customs.



HOW IS JWS HELPING THE WARLPURI COMMUNITY?

Despite a thriving community of Aboriginal artists in Yuendumu and the presence of a successful not-for-profit media organisation, Pintubi Anmatjere Warlpiri (PAW) Media, Tin Truck has identified various challenging socio-economic factors facing the Yuendumu community, such as the quality of housing and lack of employment opportunities for the Aboriginal community.



JWS's ongoing work for Tin Truck will involve forming a charitable company which is proposing to hold all of the leases in Yuendumu and sublet the residential properties to NGOs and government service providers, as well as provide affordable housing to the Aboriginal community. The intention is that the Aboriginal run company will be responsible for not only the leasing, but the ongoing maintenance and management of the premises to improve the quality of housing in the community.

In addition, JWS has been asked to set up a charitable Aboriginal Corporation whose membership and board composition will be representative of the eight skin groups making up the Warlpiri people at Yuendumu, in

effect vesting the company with the cultural authority to represent the Warlpiri community. The Aboriginal Corporation's purpose will be to provide a voice to the Warlpiri people at Yuendumu to provide social agency, cultural empowerment and act as an interface between the Warlpiri people and the broader community.

It was an honour to have been invited to observe such a significant cultural moment for the Warlpiri people and to have met the community who will be directly impacted by the work JWS is doing alongside Tin Truck.

Special thanks to our Corporate, Tax and Property teams who have been assisting Tin Truck, in particular, Martin Kudnig, Julian Wan, Claudia Scardigno, Dominic Surace, Eleanor Kwak and Cassidy Smith.

