

The Statewide Cultural Corridors Project and The Edmund Rice Institute for Social Justice, Fremantle



Nidja Nyoongar Boodjar Noonook Nyininy.
(This is Nyoongar country; you are sitting in it.)

The Edmund Rice Institute for Social Justice, Fremantle accepted in late 2008 an invitation from Aboriginal elders to become a principal partner – with the South-West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council - in one of the largest Aboriginal-run projects in Western Australian history.

The project straddles eight major fields, with the first (Cultural Corridors) being a juvenile justice diversionary program. Together, the eight projects aim at nothing less than the full revival of Aboriginal people in Western Australia, as well as new forms of partnership with, and learning from, Aboriginal people by the rest of the population.

Initiated within Nyoongar Western Australia, these projects built so much momentum and excitement during 2009 that a decision was made – urged by WA’s judiciary - that they ‘go Statewide’.

In September 2008, the Institute was approached by Aboriginal elders and invited to become a major partner in one of the most ambitious and important indigenous self-advancement projects in Australian history. After two lengthy presentations and conversations at ERISJ Board Meetings with Cultural Corridors’ lead custodian, Dr Noel Nannup, the ERISJ indicated its support for joining the project.

All the behind-the-scenes work of 2007 and 2008 led to Cultural Corridors official launch on 13 November 2008 to the Nyoongar community and official decision makers. This meeting comprised many of the 88 Nyoongar elders that had developed and endorsed the proposal, leading Aboriginal NGOs, WA Cabinet ministers and heads of department, the Chief Justice and the President of the Children’s Court. Dr Nannup introduced the ERISJ as one of Cultural Corridors’ three principal partners, along with the eldership and the South-West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council. The ERISJ plays some seven discrete roles in what has since become known as the *ERISJ Statewide Cultural Corridors, Rippleback* and related Aboriginal-led projects. Secondary partners include Lotterywest, the Department of Sport and Recreation, four other WA Government Departments, and the Australian Employment Covenant. This initiative of Aboriginal elders and partner organisations works holistically across key dimensions of Aboriginal advancement:

- diversion and rehabilitation programs for Aboriginal youth offenders;
- cultural and language revival;
- vocational education and training, including bridging into apprenticeships;
- leadership development;
- Land Care, and Indigenous Heritage and Environmental Protection and Care;

- Tourism;
- Aboriginal Enterprises, including medicinal uses of plants and carbon sequestration on Aboriginal land; and
- building understanding of Aboriginal culture among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

Viewed together, these initiatives aim at nothing less than the revival of Aboriginal people in Western Australia, as well as new forms of partnership with, and learning from, Aboriginal people by the rest of the population. While initiated within Nyoongar Western Australia, these projects have built so much momentum and excitement during the past twelve months that there is now an intention that they 'go Statewide'. The President of the WA Children's Court Dennis Reynolds and Chief Justice of Western Australia Wayne Martin have supported this, given the capacity for the entire WA legal system to engage with new approaches to Aboriginal youth sentencing.

The Cultural Corridors' office, secretariat and public meeting site is at the ERISJ. The Institute is represented on CC's leadership group and plays multiple roles. With the chairmanship of elder Dean Wynne, Cultural Corridors' inspiring vision of 2008 became the painstaking work of 2009, putting flesh onto its bones. For example, several pilot juvenile diversion programs near Wave Rock, Albany and elsewhere were run. A number of Nyoongar men and women 'stepped up' to join the leadership group during 2009, along with several volunteers in the secretariat. There is an intranet site through which stakeholders constantly communicate. A highlight was the 29-30 April stay at Oral Maguire's farm East of York, with Nyoongar leaders and WA Children's Court President Dennis Reynolds, with Oral, Clem Rodney and Kim Collard providing some traditional local Aboriginal knowledge as we walked country there.

Key documents developed during 2009 included:

- *"Business Case for a 'Statewide Cultural Corridors Program' – A Program for Coordinating Aboriginal Social Justice Services"*
- *"Notes on development of a business case for the Nyoongar Juvenile Justice Diversion Project 2010"; and*
- *"Nyoongar Men's Project – Munda Biddi Trial".*

In December 2009, Lotterywest approved funding for a 2010 project - with the ERISJ as auspicing organisation - to articulate a full Strategic Plan, Business Case, and the philosophical, program and partnership key elements into a very substantial document. A Nyoongar Cultural Corridors Expo at the ERISJ for a week in August or September 2010 then follows. There will be a dedicated day for each of three groups: Aboriginal people, State and Federal politicians and the corporate sector, and the general WA public. The Expo will be preceded by a communications strategy to inform Aboriginal people and the wider community, with the Expo a rallying point for broadening the support base. The entire focus is that the project ensures from the outset cultural prescription, directions, reference and authentication of the project by the Nyoongar people and community.

This will then be taken to the WA and Federal Government departments, the corporate sector and philanthropists to support their substantial funding pledges already received. In 2009, the ERISJ provided personal briefings about Cultural Corridors to State Government ministers, Prime Minister Rudd, Fremantle MHR Melissa Parke MP, Australian Ambassador-delegate to Washington Beazley, and senior WA public servants.