

Noongar Culture, Arts and Community Centre - Golden Valley Tree Park

My name is Sandra Hill, I'm a Noongar Elder and I've resided in Balingup since 2007. As a member of the Hill family, Elders from Busselton and Bunbury have entrusted me with the cultural obligation of taking responsibility for the song line that runs between the Australian section and European section of the Golden Valley Tree Park (Old Padbury Road) on behalf of my people. Over eons, untold generations of my ancestors and members of the Hill family have had a continuous and unbroken connection to this country and to this song line.

My grandfather's brother Pop Charles Hill was known as '*King Charlie*' and was the cultural custodian and Elder of the area ranging from Burekup to Manjimup. Pop Charles Hill was also known as Balya or Balinga, it was my direct ancestor who shared the name '*Yungerup*' with the colonial settlers who took up the land, today known as the Golden Valley Tree Park, a Park which retains this name for the freshwater spring "*Yungerup Springs*". Springs like this one, Kaip, are sacred to our people.

The following was taken from the GVTP website:

"The land comprising the Park was formerly two farming properties, namely Golden Valley whose homestead was built in the 1880's, and Yungerup, which was settled in 1898. *The spring at Yungerup was a favoured hunting site for Nyungar people, according to Balya Balinga, the Aboriginal man after whom Balingup was named.* The property name denotes this story through a misspelling of 'yonger' meaning kangaroo in the Nyungar language." (Miss Olwen Cleveland pers. comm.)

The Golden Valley Tree Park is strategically placed in our cultural landscape on the trading line that forms the meeting point of three different language groups in the South West; the Wadandi, Bibulmun and Kaneang peoples. This is hugely significant to our people as the traditional cultural heritage of this meeting place allows the different clans to gather and talk business. Mullalyup, only a few kilometres away is the place for men's business and ceremonial practices. Balingup is a women's place with known birthing sites in and around the town precinct.

As custodians, our people need to be able to access the Golden Valley Tree Park to develop and create a Noongar Culture, Art and Community Precinct, for the survival of our culture and the future of our people. Our proposal may afford us the last opportunity to walk as custodians on this most significant ancient path, rather than being tenants or guests on our own country.

The purpose of this precinct is to enable traditional owners, to re-establish a base on

country at this important site that:

- Will ensure effective management of our interests in land; and enables arts and cultural practices that celebrate, re-asserts and invigorates our culture.
- Afford us the opportunity to establish a cultural base and re-invigorate our country.

This would entail building a distributed Cultural Centre situated within the tree park, designed to fit discretely into the landscape and away from the vicinity of the usual routes that visitors to the park traverse.

The GVTP is also significant today in that it lies within close proximity to large populations of our local Noongar people. Donnybrook, Bunbury, Busselton, Collie, Manjimup, Capel, Harvey and Boyup Brook are all within a one hour drive from Balingup. Day trips for our elders and our people to the centre are feasible, allowing our community to access cultural activities that take place. This also makes the site very attractive for non-indigenous people wanting to visit in order to actively participate in the cross-cultural programs on offer.

Our purpose is to deliver sustainable social, economic and cultural development benefits for Local Noongar people by pursuing two clear goals:

- To establish at the Golden Valley Tree Park a living and vibrant cultural, arts and educational precinct, and;
- To effectively manage, to preserve and to enhance the land and natural resources at the Golden Valley Tree Park now and into the future.

Our cultural precinct will not impact on the park in terms of existing amenity or activities, instead it will add to them. Visitors will still be able to come to the park to walk, stop for a picnic or a barbecue lunch or simply wander around the park. However, with our contribution they will also be able to connect and participate in numerous Noongar cultural activities.

For instance, the annual community Spring Picnic would still take place as well as all other current activities (such as weddings and other community functions) however they would enjoy increased amenity in the park, due to the structures and other improvements we propose.

As there has never been any other attraction like it, the precinct could very well become the jewel in the crown of the South West of W.A. We see it as a critical step moving forward, inspiring other projects and partnerships.

Overall benefits for the Noongar community will include –

Noongar people dream of a future where our cultural identity remains strong, where we have a home base from which we can progress our goals, and take charge of our own destiny.

Cultural survival and revival.

Being able to learn how to carry out cultural customary practices.

Learn how to care for country on country.

Participation of, and inclusion of all members of the community.

Sharing cultural knowledge with one another and the wider community.

Having a meeting place on country.

Being able to access and participate in culturally specific training programs on country.

Being given the opportunity to learn Noongar language on country.

Autonomy in making decisions relating to cultural mores.

Bridging the gap between the black and the white communities.

Welcoming others to country which is, in the custodianship of the Noongar people.

Cultural Activities –

Traditional dance workshops.

Toolmaking activities.

Bush tucker workshops.

Booka (kangaroo skin cloak) making.

Traditional cooking techniques.

Cultural Art Festivals.

Traditional storytelling.

Men's camps and women's camps.

Six seasons activities.

Respite for Elders and 'Coolbaroo' social dances.

Language revival.

Bushfood, cultivation, preparation.

Bush medicines.

The Visual Arts –

Dedicated professional Arts practice / training and workshops –

Professional art workshops.

Artist in Residence programs.

Art exhibitions and displays of authentic Noongar art.

The ethical and professional sale of Noongar art.

Painting in all mediums, printmaking, weaving, papermaking, fabric dying, textiles, photography, ceramics, bookmaking, sculpture, mixed media, new media.

Please see attached Artist CV for Sandra Hill.

To summarise, the following educational activities and services could take place at the centre -

Cultural practices, Noongar language workshops, bush foods, bush medicines, traditional land management training (including burning), stolen generation healing programs, cross cultural informal gatherings, youth counselling services, cultural heritage survey training, cultural awareness training, cultural tourism training, landscape restoration work, bush products cultivation, hospitality and chef programs, business management workshops. Etc.

As you can anticipate, having a dedicated space, culturally appropriate, culturally secure and culturally safe for our people, that can be valued and be comfortably accessed by the Noongar community as well as the non indigenous community, will help close the gap as well as assist in generating reciprocity between our communities and government agencies. The Golden Valley Tree Park, would be the ideal location for this to happen.

Passing our Culture on.

Within the Noongar community a minority of our elders, custodians, leaders and young people have received traditional and professional training in caring for country. Ranger training projects utilizing our knowledge and developed by our senior cultural custodians, in partnership with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions are a major activity and a priority for our elders considering the impending Native Title Settlement.

Having a Noongar 'friendly', culturally secure training facility will allow our young people to learn best practice in traditional management from the Elders and cultural custodians who still retain the traditional protocols and knowledge required to care for our Boodja and Kaip. (Lands and waters.)

Our Projects will help us to provide education/training and pathways to employment for our future generations in fields that can ensure our cultural survival.

For example the rainfall, geology, soil types, and trees currently present at this site can allow us to work, together with partners, on the development of a botanical garden and arboretum of international significance. This would enable many rare flora of Noongar country to be securely stored in a living collection renowned not just for its beauty and diversity of cultural and rare plants, trees and fungi, but for its contribution to modern science and conservation.

In this setting, our elders can work with DBCA and University partners to share, explore and transmit to our next generation our methodologies for the regeneration of rare flora and fauna, seed harvesting, planting regimes, and especially our traditional fire practices. Following our six Noongar seasons and handed down lore and experience.

Partnerships –

Full custodianship of the Golden Valley Tree Park will allow us to form partnerships with;

-The local community and community groups and organisations, the Golden Valley Tree Park Management Committee and the Merry Men respectively.

- The Balingup Progress Association. We recognise our shared values and will commit to working together, we aim to support local jobs, local initiatives, and local businesses where possible. We have considerable support from the local community.

- The Department of Biodiversity Conservations and Attractions. The GVTP falls in the South West Boodjara and Gnalla Karla Boodja ILU areas.

-The shires of Greenbushes-Bridgetown and Donnybrook-Balingup. The GVTP falls in both shires.

- The West Australian Tourism Operators Council, The West Australian Tourism Association, Indigenous food organisations, the friends of the Bibulmun track.

- Undalup Association, Busselton. The association is a Busselton based organization that promotes community events such as Aboriginal festivals and tourism related activities.

- South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council. Our strategic platform has previously been embraced by SWALSC who listed the former Tone River Town site to fall into the Settlement estate, in order to develop the Cultural, Arts and Community Project we are now applying to develop in Balingup. Unfortunately the Tone River site was sold for a pittance to a non-Indigenous group. Despite its cultural significance on site, and as the meeting point of three traditional language groups.

- A range of other Noongar organisations.

- Universities.

-Blackwood Catchments Council –(strong supporters)

-South West Development Commission, who have signalled strong interest.

The values that guide us;

- If we look after Noongar country, our country will look after us.
- We will honour Noongar land, our traditions, art and our customs by demonstrating cultural integrity in all that we do.
- We will always respect and recognize our Elders, their knowledge of country and the ways they pass on this knowledge to future generations.
- We recognize and pay tribute to the resilience of past generations, both what they endured and what they achieved.
- We take pride in Noongar identity and our right to be recognized as traditional custodians, first and foremost.
- We are Noongar people, and as traditional owners assert our right to be recognized and acknowledged as such.
- We will practice and preserve our language and value it as a marker of our cultural identity.
- We will practice and preserve our culture and hold on to our customs and traditions whereby older ones guide the younger ones following behind and learning in their footsteps.

Our Organization.

Our association is currently in the process of forming a constitution, to be registered as a Social Venture Not-For-Profit Company Limited by Guarantee. Our board members have a century of governance experience between us, and, we are currently considering new board applicants including Professor Fiona Stanley.

Our competitive edge is the ability to leverage volunteering capacity drawing on our network comprising a large number of highly committed professionals. Our supporters include individuals with internationally and nationally renowned expertise in the arts, anthropology, education, environmental management, corporate education, bush foods, hospitality, cultural tourism, eco-tourism, building, parks and reserve management.

Pibulmun/Wadandi Elder and Cultural Custodian Wayne Webb will be developing and running most of our cultural programs and activities. Wayne and Toni Webb are members of the South West Boodja Claimant Group, Wayne is a named applicant and member of the working party. They have earned the deep respect of both the Noongar

and the non-Aboriginal community through a lifetime of ceaseless service to the environment and the retention of cultural heritage on their country.

Our supporters and members include many with the profile to help build and sustain the supportive partnerships necessary to turn our vision into reality. We hope to also include individuals drawn from agencies with responsibilities in critical areas that will assist us to progress our vision, together.

We believe that there's merit in forming an advisory board with relevant independent expertise in critical areas such as land management and look forward to discussing a joint management arrangement with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. To this end should it not be possible for SWALSC to list this land in our land rights settlement, we are willing to negotiate a land-swap with the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions to keep our dreams, aspirations and culture alive.

The impending Native Title Settlement will provide business development and cultural survival opportunities for our people and as such SWALSC have embraced the cultural hub that we are now endeavouring to create at the GVTP. Due to the Elders involved, our Not-For-Profit ethos and the contribution we can make to our community and state our project fits the purpose and criteria for SWALSC support as an exemplar.

Community support.

The local Noongar people see this proposal as ultimately not only contributing to ^{our} own cultural, social and economic resurgence; but also to that of the wider region. A public meeting held on the 26 May by the Balingup Progress Association afforded me the opportunity to talk openly to members of the Balingup community about the idea of a Noongar Cultural Arts precinct at the Golden Valley Tree Park and the outcome was astoundingly positive. Almost every person in the hall made it very clear that it was an excellent idea and that the tree park was the perfect place to develop the cultural precinct.

Local business owners also had a positive response to the project as they realized that whatever activities took place at the precinct that there would be a 'knock on' effect for the businesses in the town because of the additional influx of tourists and visitors to the cultural precinct. This activity could be all year around as we celebrate each of the Noongar six seasons with various cultural activities.

Other supporters of our project from the Western Australian community include: Fred Chaney, Fred Chaney Snr., Dr Fiona Stanley, Professor Stephen D. Hopper- Professor of Biodiversity UWA, Janet Holmes `a Court, Duncan Ord, Director General of the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, Eden Shepherd, Chair-Moorambilla Voices, Lynn Webber- St Catherine's College, South West Development

Commission, Mossenson Galleries, Subiaco, Hon. David Templeman, Minister for Local Government; Heritage; Culture and The Arts, Hon. Roger Cook, Deputy Premier; Minister For Health; Mental Health, Mike O'Neil Building, George Hayden, Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University, Julian Bowron, Director- Bunbury Regional Art Gallery, Sharon Tassicker, Collections Manager– Holmes a Janet Court Collection, Christine Scoggin, CEO -Country Arts WA, Lotterywest, Dan Mossenson, Emeritus Partner –Lavan Legal.

We have a plan that can help to make the Golden Valley Tree Park the jewel in the crown of the South West for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. More than this we have the capacity to enhance its value, utility and amenity, and establish it as an asset, not just for our local community, but also for our State and the nation. We undertake to hold it in trust for future generations in perpetuity.

We will strive to become universally recognized as a leader in the field of culture and the arts. Not only for achieving social justice outcomes but also for contributing to our South West community as well as the State of Western Australia.

Sandra Hill – Visual Artist

Cultural Custodian and Elder – Wadandi, Pibulmun, Menang peoples