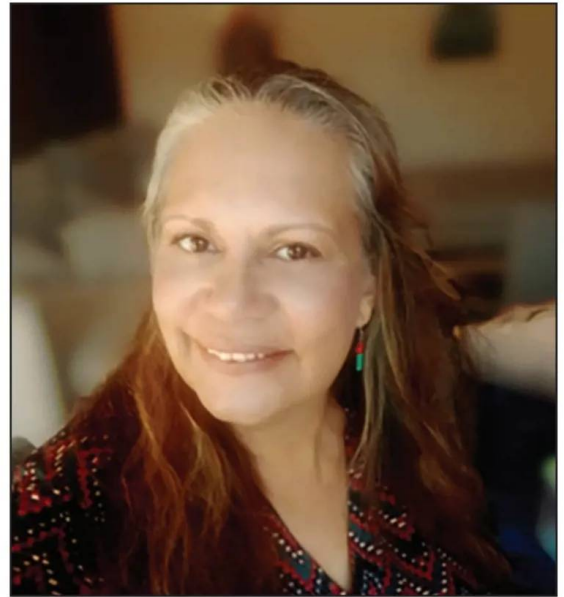


Healing through culture and connection



Gillian King was born on Larrakia Country with connections to the Gurindji, Noongar Whadjuk and Noongar Balardong peoples, and the Great South West of Western Australia. Gillian has been a participant, co-facilitator and leading facilitator with the National Empowerment Project, delivering in the community and in Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women. Gillian is a Western Australian wildflower therapist and has offered healing from Country to groups such as the Department of Communities, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) playgroups, Aboriginal Women's leadership workshops, and the Stolen Generations. Recently, Gillian has participated in the Wadjemup Project as a self-care facilitator to women from the Kimberley, the Pilbara, the Murchison, the Goldfields and the Great Southern region of WA.

my own cultural lens, and I meet people where they're at.

In recent times, I've worked with younger participants – many of whom have grown up navigating fast-paced digital lives and social media – but who still carry the same longing for identity, for culture, and for understanding where they come from.

What surprised me was how ready they were to talk about colonisation, about identity loss, and the struggles they face. They came with open hearts and strong voices, and often, they taught me as much as I taught them.

Participants consistently tell me the most valuable part of the program is the safe cultural space. For many, it's the first time they've been in a room where they feel seen, heard, and not judged. Some come in thinking they're alone in their struggles – then they realise others have been through the same. There's a deep sense of relief and release in that realisation.

We also see real outcomes. One young man I worked with started the program feeling disconnected and unsure of his path. By the end, he had taken control of his health, begun a traineeship, and became an advocate not just for himself but for his family. These are the ripple effects of empowerment.

At Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women, I've facilitated the CSEWB Program multiple times. In 2022, the women created a mural representing their healing journey through the Social and Emotional Wellbeing wheel. In 2024, they created a powerful video in partnership with the

Department of Justice. These projects weren't just art – they were acts of truth-telling, of reclaiming identity, and of building cultural pride behind prison walls.

Even after graduation, many women stay connected to what they learned. Some have rejoined their families, some are leading in their own communities. Others have continued on with training and work. While not every story ends neatly, the seeds planted during the program often continue to grow long after the final session.

The truth is our people carry so much. But they also carry incredible knowledge, wisdom, and strength. The CSEWB Program doesn't give them that – it reminds them of what's already there.

Being a facilitator of this program is one of the most meaningful roles I've ever had. It's not just about running workshops – it's about honouring our ancestors, walking gently with our people, and creating space for healing through culture and connection.

As I often say at the end of each program: Dabakan Koorliny Moorditj Bidi – go slowly, walk strongly on a good path.

Boordawan.

Gillian King
Facilitator – National Empowerment Project (CSEWB), Langford Aboriginal Association.

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Vision board activity as part of the program.



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– not just hearing, but truly listening and feeling with spirit – is one of the most powerful things we can offer.

As facilitators, we are not immune to life's pressures. Ensuring safety – emotional, cultural, and psychological – remains paramount. Exploring trauma is deeply layered, and safe spaces are essential. The strength of the NEP lies in its conversations (yarning), in filling

the gaps, and in its holistic approach to the individual across all CSEWB domains.

One of the key things I've learned is to adapt to the needs of the group in front of me. I no longer feel the need to rush through content. Instead, I make space for Mob to process, to share, to grieve, laugh and celebrate. That's where the real healing happens. I bring my humour, my lived experience,

As a proud Noongar/Gurindji woman and long-time facilitator of the Cultural, Social and Emotional Wellbeing (CSEWB) Program, I have walked alongside many of our people on their journeys of healing, reconnection and empowerment. Over the past seven years delivering the program through the National Empowerment Project (NEP) with Langford Aboriginal Association, in partnership with the University of Western Australia, I've witnessed firsthand the strength that lies within our culture, community and shared stories.

The CSEWB Program was created by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people, grounded in the lived experiences of our communities. It focuses on our identity and cultural strengths, addressing the ongoing impacts of colonisation, trauma, and loss while uplifting the power of connection – to Country, mind and body, kinship, spirit, and community. The program is holistic and healing. It doesn't come from a deficit approach. Instead, it celebrates what's already within us.

Each session is an opportunity to unpack complex issues in a culturally safe space. We explore topics like intergenerational trauma, grief and loss, racism, and lateral violence – but we always bring it back to resilience, pride, reconciliation and hope. The structure of the program allows space for yarning, creativity, reflection, movement and ceremony. We honour Aboriginal knowledge systems and ways of being.

For me as a facilitator, this role has been deeply transformational. While I've supported many others through the program, I've also grown personally. Over time, I've shifted from being a NEP participant, co-facilitator, and lead facilitator or “teacher” of content to a “holder” of space. I've learned that every group is different, and that deep listening