Health in public spaces

Promoting mental health and wellbeing through the

Arts and Environment Scheme

By: John McLeod, Simon Pryor, John Meade for the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2004

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

VicHealth

Mental Health Promotion Framework 1999-2002

Determinants of Mental Health

Social connectedness
- Supportive relationships and environments
- Social networks and physical activities
- Valued social position

Freedom from discrimination and violence
- Physical security
- Self-determination and control of one's life

Economic participation
- Work
- Education
- Housing
- Money

Themes for Action

Social connectedness • Freedom from discrimination • Economic participation

Health promotion action
- Research
- Workforce education and skill development
- Participation pilots
- Community strengthening
- Organisational development
- Advocacy for legislative and policy reform
- Communication/Social marketing

Population groups
- People who live in rural communities
- Young people
- Older women and men
- Kooris
- New arrivals to Australia

Settings for Action

SPORT RECREATION	COMMUNITY	EDUCATION	WORKPLACE	THE ARTS CULTURE ENTERTAINMENT	HEALTH

Intermediate Outcomes

Individual
- Increased mental health literacy

Community
- Accessible and appropriate services
- Safe environments

Organisational
- Healthy policies and programs
- Partnerships in mental health promotion

Reduced Anxiety, Depression

Long-term Benefits

- Improved physical health
- Improved productivity at work, at home, at school
- Improved quality of life
- Improved life expectancy

Health in public spaces

Promoting mental health and wellbeing through the

Arts and Environment Scheme

By: John McLeod, Simon Pryor, John Meade

For the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2004

Cover photograph by Mark Wilson. Artwork by Geoff Hogg.

Contents

Introduction

Promotion of mental health and wellbeing are central goals for the work of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth). The Arts and Environment Scheme has been an important way of achieving them. The partnerships with local government to promote the health of all citizens, and the skills and resources of artists and community members are all integral components of our work in this area.

A 'liveable' city or local area contains public spaces that are safe, welcoming and aesthetically engaging. Such spaces are also used by many different people for recreation, to meet friends and chat, or simply to sit. A public space that is much used can create a sense of community, belonging and identity. Sometimes this just happens because of the location or the natural beauty of an area. If well designed, in urban or built up areas, public space can contribute to people feeling as if they belong to a community.

There is, of course, considerable overlap between the physical health impacts of the environment and mental health and wellbeing. For example, an increase in traffic tends to lead to the perception that an environment is unsafe for pedestrians. People are less likely to use the streets and meet their neighbours. Similarly, a lack of access to community services and organisations changes our perceptions of that community.

Consequently public spaces can either be health limiting or health enhancing. They can facilitate safe passage for citizens, create access to community resources and instil a sense of community connection and cohesion or they can alienate, isolate and deter people from engagement in public space and life.

Public space can appeal to the senses through sight, touch and sound. Through creative activity, a new vision can be brought to an area so that we see it in a new light. It changes our view of the space but it also changes the way we see ourselves within it. Through design and art, a public space can be filled with meaning. It can be endowed with a sense of occasion so that it is a place of significance for the people who use it. Thus, well-designed public space can make a positive contribution to the mental health and wellbeing of a community.

Public space planning is often a task performed by local government for the local community. The Arts and Environment Scheme sees our planning scheme as a joint venture. With is the operative word. Each of the eight councils funded through the scheme worked with members of their community to design public spaces that are engaging, inclusive and aesthetically arresting. For these councils, public spaces are no longer simply about recreation, a conduit for traffic or a generalised amenity. Public spaces are about enhancing the mental health and wellbeing of the community.

Dr Rob Moodie
Chief Executive Officer

Summary of the scheme

Summary of the scheme

In 1999, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) developed its Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002 (MHPP).

The Arts and Environment Scheme was one component of a comprehensive range of initiatives that is designed to implement the MHPP between 2000 and 2003. This report is the evaluation of the scheme's first phase.

Other publications in this series focus on VicHealth-funded mental health promotion activities concerned with people who have recently arrived in Australia, young people, Indigenous communities, participation in community arts and rural partnerships.

This chapter of the report provides a detailed description of the scheme and its context. It also highlights the key learnings and the role of evaluation in this scheme. A number of the issues addressed in this chapter are explored in much greater detail in the following chapters.

A conceptual framework for planning and implementing innovations to promote mental health and wellbeing

As part of the MHPP, VicHealth developed a conceptual framework to guide planning and implementation[1]. This framework identifies strategies and processes to address key determinants of mental health. It also outlines specific outcomes to guide the evaluation of the plan itself and funded programs. The framework, discussed in detail below, is summarised in the figure inside the front cover.

Defining mental health

Mental health is defined in the MHPP as the embodiment of social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Mental health provides individuals with the vitality necessary for active living, to achieve goals, and to interact with one another in ways that are respectful and just.

Mental health promotion: VicHealth's approach

The MHPP's approach to mental health promotion aims to achieve better mental health and wellbeing across populations by:

- Focusing on improving the social, physical and economic environments that determine the mental health of populations and individuals.

- Focusing on enhancing protective factors such as coping capacity, resilience and connectedness of individuals and communities to improve emotional and social wellbeing.

- Taking a whole-of-population approach, although interventions may focus on specific population groups.

- Measuring outcomes in terms of public policy, organisational practices and community capacity.

Determinants of mental health and priority themes for action

A number of factors influence a person's mental health and wellbeing, and among them are individual attributes such as heredity, luck, knowledge, attitude and skills. However, there is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates social, economic and environmental conditions also play an important role. In particular, VicHealth identified three determinants as the priority themes for its Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002.

Social connectedness, including:

- Social and community connectedness.

- Stable and supportive environments.

- A variety of social and physical activities.

- Access to networks and supportive relationships.

- A valued social position.

Freedom from discrimination and violence, including:

- Physical security.

- Opportunity for self-determination and control of one's life.

---

[1] This report is written according to the 1999 – 2002 framework, available on the inside front cover of this report for reference. The current 2005 – 2007 framework is available on the inside back cover of this report.

Economic participation, including:

- Access to work and meaningful engagement.
- Access to education.
- Access to adequate housing.
- Access to money.

Theme one: Social connectedness

Social connectedness involves having someone to talk to, trust, depend on and who knows you well.[2] An individual's level of social integration and social support are powerful predictors not only of their mental health status but also of morbidity and mortality.[3] For example, young people with poor social connectedness are two to three times more likely to experience depressive symptoms when compared with peers who report the availability of confiding relationships[4]. In recognition of the link between social connection and mental health, the MHPP focuses on strategies to increase connections between individuals and communities.

Theme two: Valuing diversity and working against discrimination

The link between discrimination and mental ill-health is well established, with exposure to discrimination increasing the risk of lowered self-esteem, social isolation, depression, anxiety, drug use and suicidal feelings.[5] For example, higher suicide rates among Indigenous and same-sex attracted young people have been attributed, in part, to discrimination on the grounds of race and sexual preference respectively.[6] Young people who are victimised are three times more likely to be at risk of having depressive symptoms compared to those not reporting such experiences.[7] Gender-related discrimination and violence have been identified as factors contributing to mental health problems in women such as excessive use of psychotropic medication and eating disorders.[8]

Victoria is a diverse society and some individuals and communities experience less favourable treatment than others. Accordingly, this aspect of the MHPP focuses on strategies that address racial discrimination, homophobia and ageism.

Theme three: Economic participation

Economic participation involves having access to employment as well as to the money necessary to feed, clothe and participate fully in community life. A growing body of evidence links poor mental health with limited access to important resources such as income, employment and education.[9] Unemployed people, for instance, experience higher levels of depression, anxiety and distress and lower self-esteem than their counterparts who are employed.[10] People living in areas with the greatest inequalities in income are 30 per cent more likely to report their health, including their mental health, as fair or poor compared with those living in areas with the smallest inequalities in income.[11]

2   Glover, S, Burns, J, Butler, H & Patton, G 1998, 'Social environments and the wellbeing of young people', *Family Matters*, no. 49, pp. 11–17.

3   See: Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council (AHMAC) Working Group, 1997, *Building Australia's capacity to promote mental health: review of infrastructure for promoting mental health in Australia*, National Mental Health Strategy.

4   Glover, op. cit.

5   University of Surrey 1998, *The impact of discrimination on mental health and emotional wellbeing, Surrey Social and Market Research*, University of Surrey UK, available at: <http://www.hea.org.uk/news/index.html>.

6   See: Department of Health and Family Services 1997, *Youth suicide in Australia: a background monograph*, AGPS, Canberra and National Children's; Youth Law Centre 1998, *Rights now*, January.

7   Glover, op. cit.

8   Raphael, B 1995, 'Research issues in women's mental health', in R Sorger (ed.), *Healthsharing*, Women's Health Resource Service, Melbourne.

9   Wilkinson, R & Marmot, M (eds) 1998, *Social determinants of health: the solid facts*, World Health Organization.

10 McLelland, A & Scotton, R 1998, 'Poverty in health', in R Fisher & E Nieuwenhuysen (eds), *Australian poverty: then and now*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp. 185–202.

11 Kennedy, B, Kawachi, I, Glass, R & Prothrow-Smith, D 1998, 'Income distribution, socio-economic status and self rated health in the United States. Multi-level analysis', *British Medical Journal*, vol. 317, October 3.

There is also some evidence to suggest that economic and social inequality can undermine broader social cohesion and, thus, negatively impacting on social connectedness and community safety.[12] For these reasons, the MHPP focuses on strategies to enhance people's access to economic resources such as education, employment and income.

Health promotion action

Traditionally, health promotion practice has focused on behaviour modification and social marketing strategies to assist individuals to combat unhealthy conditions. While the MHPP recognises the importance of these strategies, it complements them with interventions to combat unhealthy conditions at their source. Therefore, the MHPP proposes that a range of strategies be supported, including:

- Research.
- Workforce development.
- Participation pilots.
- Community strengthening.
- Organisational development.
- Advocacy for legislative and policy reform.
- Communication and social marketing.

Target population groups

A person's location in the broader social and economic structure, both as an individual and as a member of a particular population group, has a profound influence on their mental health. In general, those groups with good access to social and economic resources have better mental health and lower rates of mental health problems than those whose access is limited.[13]

Settings for action

The plan is based on the understanding that successful action to promote mental health and prevent mental ill health can only be achieved and sustained with the involvement and support of the whole community, and the development of collaborative partnerships across sectors. These partnerships include those in public, private and non-government organisations across the sectors in which people live, are educated and work.

Accordingly, the MHPP identifies a number of settings for action including the community, workplaces, and organisations dealing with sport, education, health and the arts.

Anticipated outcomes

Mental health promotion strategies are implemented with the aim of reducing preventable mental ill health and promoting mental health at the population level. This will enhance productivity, contribute to improvements in physical health, and reduce the social and economic costs associated with mental ill health. These longer term outcomes are made possible by building the capacity of individuals, communities and organisations to take action to foster the conditions required for mental health.

The aim for individuals is to improve their health knowledge and their ability to access services. At the community level, the aim is to foster safe and supportive environments that offer accessible and appropriate opportunities for participation.

The aim for organisations is to develop policies and programs that promote mental health, and to build partnerships within and outside the health sector. Partnerships contribute to health promotion capacity by engaging a broader base of skills, expertise and resources. They also broaden the reach of any mental health promotion endeavour.

The evaluation of the Arts and Environment Scheme should be seen in the context of the MHPP.

---

[12] Wilkinson, R 1997, 'Income inequality and social cohesion', *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 87, no. 9.

[13] Power, C, Hertsman, C, Mathews, S & Manor, O 1997, 'Social differences in health. Life cycle effects between ages 23 and 33 in the 1958 British birth cohort', *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 87, no. 9.
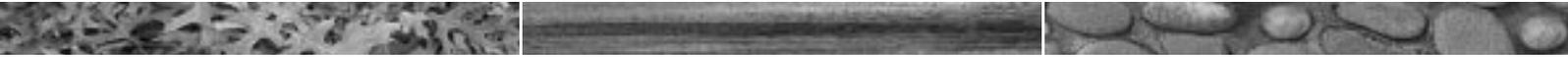
The Arts and Environment Scheme: An overview

The scheme's aims were to:

- Promote social connection and valuing of diversity through visual representation, project design, implementation and publicity.

- Increase the capacity of councils to undertake creative projects that enhance the physical environment and therefore to promote wellbeing.

- Enhance public places through innovative design.

- Integrate the work of artists as part of a multi-disciplinary team.

- Involve community participation throughout the project's development and implementation.

- Enhance public spaces that are accessible to, and utilised by, members of the community.

- Document and disseminate models of good practice.

Eight local governments were funded for $80,000 over a two-year period to work with the local community on creative projects dealing with public space. The councils comprised:

- City of Banyule.

- City of Casey.

- City of Greater Dandenong.

- City of Port Phillip.

- City of Yarra.

- Golden Plains Shire.

- Mt Alexander Shire.

- Rural City of Swan Hill.

The scheme made a significant contribution to mental health promotion, particularly through the development of social connectedness. Social connectedness was evident through the processes of engagement of, consultation with, and participation by the community. Social connectedness was also embedded in the design of the environments and the nature of the artworks created as part of the scheme. Most of the eight funded councils deliberately engaged people who were marginalised or vulnerable in significant ways. The scheme gave them a voice

and agency in the planning decisions that had an impact on their community.

The projects led by example. Mental health promotion was implicit in all the work in each site. However, its explicit articulation could still have been strengthened within the scheme. The rationale for the development of public environments art in relation to mental health promotion needs to be apparent and part of the public discourse in which stakeholders engage.

The scheme had an educative function, especially for local government. This was particularly evident in the manner in which public space and art were being conceptualised and developed. The way the arts can facilitate social connectedness and value diversity is now well understood within local government. The link between these social determinants and the health of the community is also more fully appreciated and is having an impact on other arms of local government.

Procedures that were central to the scheme, such as engaging communities and involving them in critical planning decisions about their environment, and developing a sense of local identity based on these processes, are being more generally applied. Consultation with the community is becoming an interactive dialogue.

Although the projects were less successful in affecting policy changes regarding municipal public health planning, less formal changes were occurring. The project engaged a range of council workers, and they were starting to use the rhetoric of the MHPP and the processes of the scheme in their work. Cultural development was moved to a more central position within the eight councils.

Involvement in the scheme was a major form of professional development for the project workers from local government. As part of the evaluation, a seminar series was organised. These seminars involved external speakers and explored some critical issues around the scheme. These seminars were open to people directly involved in the scheme and other workers in local government, community arts and cultural development. The seminars expanded the reach of the scheme. The rhetoric of mental health promotion provided an additional rationale for cultural development and helped to consolidate its position as central to local government.

In addition to these less tangible outcomes, each municipality now has a significant artwork (or works) that has changed the environment. The spaces in which they sit have, in many instances, been landscaped by participating councils. They are now more welcoming, aesthetically interesting and used by community members. The works also embody a sense of shared identity and community.

The rationale for the scheme

Local governments were selected as the focus for this scheme for a number of reasons. Managing the environment, in particular public space, is one of their major roles. Their constituency is the whole community. They also provide a range of health and planning services on which the scheme can have an impact. For example, municipal health plans now include a category for creative and artistic activities. However, there was a lack of understanding and evidence on the way in which public environments contribute to a community's health.

From VicHealth's point of view, the scheme was designed to influence local government. The desire was to involve council in mental health promotion on a more permanent basis. The Mental Health Promotion Plan deals with the social and *structural* determinants of mental health. There is an emphasis on the conditions that need to exist to enable people to be healthy. Although these are often beyond the control of individuals, they are within the ambit of local government.

In addition to the effectiveness of each project (in terms of the involvement of the community and the quality of the work created), the scheme, as a whole, needed to be judged on its ability to have an impact on the policies and procedures of local government.

There is now considerable research evidence that suggests the nature of the environment has an impact on the quality of life afforded to the people who live within it. Over many decades, there has been a focus on such things as the quality of water and air, and waste disposal. There have also been concerns to ensure the built environment is of an appropriate human scale and reflects its use by people. Increasingly, there is a link between the nature of built environments, their design, and the way in which they contribute to the health of the communities that live there. Urban design is an important part of the overall health and wellbeing of the community as measured by rates of morbidity, economic participation and crime.[14]

However, most of the research tends to focus on physical health and there is an intuitive appeal about the results.[15] Modern urban environments normally privilege cars over other forms of transport. Health impacts include a greater number of accidents, decreased safety, increased air and noise pollution, and a decrease in physical activity that leads to obesity.[16]

Dannenburg et al.[17] argue that the impact of the built environment also needs to be considered in terms of social justice. People with low socioeconomic status may suffer disproportionately from the adverse consequences of a lack of public transport and decisions that have been made about land use in their communities.

---

[14] See, for example, Social Exclusion Unit 1998, *Bringing Britain together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal*, The Stationery Office, London.

[15] See, for example, Handy, S, Boarnet, M, Ewing, R & Killingworth, R, 2002, 'How the built environment affects physical activity: views from urban planning', *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, vol. 23, no. 2.

[16] Dora, C & Phillips, M (eds) 2000, *Transport, environment and health*, World Health Organization regional publications, European series, no. 89.

[17] Dannenberg, A, Jackson, R, Frumkin, H, & Schieber A, 2003, 'The impact of community design and land-use choices on public health: a scientific research agenda', *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 93, no. (9).
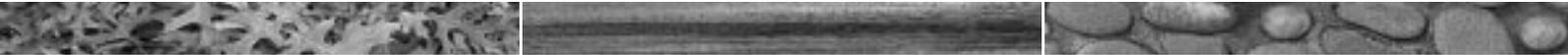
There is, of course, considerable overlap between the physical health impacts of the environment and mental health and wellbeing. For example, an increase in traffic tends to lead to the perception that an environment is unsafe for pedestrians. People are less likely to use the streets and meet their neighbours. Similarly, a lack of access to community services and organisations changes our perceptions of that community.

The link between the physical environment and mental health is now receiving attention in the research literature.[18] 'Place' is as much a social construct as a physical reality. A person's 'place in the world' includes their socioeconomic status, efficacy, perceptions of opportunity and sense of belonging.[19] Frumkin goes on to cite research that a sense of community increases when neighbourhoods are walkable, and when well-maintained public spaces are located near homes.

He argues that public places are important:

Research on public park use suggests that several design features play a role, including the amount and type of vegetation; presence of interesting meandering pathways; quiet areas for sitting and reading; recreational amenities; adequate information and signage; and perceived level of safety. People's conceptions of parks, the expectations they bring to them, and the ways they use them vary greatly according to age, gender and ethnicity.

There is research evidence that quite modest interventions can have a significant impact on people's mental and wellbeing. For example, Kou[20] undertook a study that looked at the effects of providing some trees and grass in public housing estates. She states:

Considerable evidence suggests that exposure to 'green' environments can enhance human effectiveness and make life's demands seem manageable...It is striking that the presence of a few trees and some grass outside a 16-storey apartment building could have any measurable effect on its inhabitants' functioning. It is all the more surprising that such a modest dose of nature could enhance an individual's capacity to manage the most important issues in her life, with an effect size comparable to that of major factors such as health and age...And the literature on the many positive side-effects of community gardening in poor urban neighborhoods suggests that resident-based greening efforts could play a surprisingly valuable role in the arsenal of weapons against poverty...Planting a few trees may help provide individuals and families with the psychological resources needed to 'take arms against a sea of troubles'.

A number of studies confirm the importance of access to nature and the impact it has on community wellbeing. For example, research shows a relationship between this access and a reduction in crime[21] and increased neighbourliness and civility[22].

Similar programs to the Arts and Environment Scheme are now being reported in the research literature.[23] For example, in the Sunnyside neighbourhood of Portland, Oregon, dilapidated urban environments were seen as promoting alienation and were associated with vandalism, crime, traffic violations and littering. These, in turn, had detrimental affects on health and wellbeing. A traffic intersection was transformed into a piazza through pavement level mosaics, trees and hanging gardens. This became a meeting place for the community.

---

[18] Hoggett, P, Murray, S, Razzaque, K & Barker, I 1999, *Urban regeneration and mental health in London*, London, Kings' Fund.

[19] Frumkin, H 2003, 'Healthy places: exploring the evidence', *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 93, no. 9.

[20] Kuo, F 2001, 'Coping with poverty: impacts of environment and attention in the inner city' *Environment and Behaviour*, vol. 33, no. 1.

[21] Kuo, F & Sullivan, W 2001, 'Environment and crime: does vegetation reduce crime?', *Environment and Behaviour*, vol. 33, no. 4.

[22] Kuo, F, Sullivan, W, Coley, R & Brunson, L 1998, 'Fertile ground for community: inner-city neighbourhood common spaces', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 26, no. 6.

[23] See, for example, Landry, C, Greene, L, Matarasso, F & Bianchini, F 1996, *The art of regeneration*, Stroud, Commedia.

In April 2003, 507 pedestrians were observed to pass through the intersection. Of these, 164 (32 per cent) interacted with the piazza including reading signs about community events, taking photographs, throwing coins into the fountain and circumnavigating the entire square compared with only 7 per cent at a similar intersection that was not improved:

The key findings of the project were:

Engaging city officials and community members early in the planning stages accommodated their ideas and concerns and facilitated completion of the Sunnyside Piazza project.

Collaboration between urban planners, community groups and non-profit organisations helped to implement new urban design features that are conducive to social interactions and community stewardship.

Creating an artistic public gathering place fostered social capital and social cohesion that may reverse alienation and isolation.[24]

In Australia, local governments incorporate an aesthetic dimension when planning and creating public spaces. Such things as trees, flowers, paving as well as public art are commonly used to make public spaces more amenable to the human condition. The aesthetics of spaces can encourage use, collective ownership and community pride. In the rhetoric of urban designers, somewhat soulless public spaces can be transformed into places that are meaningful and pleasing to the people who use them.[25] The challenge of the Arts and Environment Scheme is to show how well-designed public space can have a positive impact on public health. The key to this is the ways in which environments encourage social inclusion.

Current concerns in local government argue for a shift in emphasis from the provision of public environments per se, to a focus on the way those environments are determined and their ongoing use. For example, Baum et al.[26] argue:

Both the quality and extent of social interactions and relationships within a city or community are important indicators of its health. It is impossible to imagine a healthy community that does not create varied and ample opportunities for its citizens to meet and interact in both formal and informal settings.

[24] Semenza, J 2003, 'The intersection of urban planning, art and public health: The Sunnyside Piazza', *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 93, no. 6.

[25] Winikoff, T (ed.) 2000, *Places not spaces – placemaking in Australia*, Envirobook, Sydney.

[26] Baum, F, Palmer, C, Modra, C, Murray, C & Bush, R 2000, 'Families, social capital and health', in I Winter (ed.), *Social capital and public policy in Australia*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

2

The scheme and mental health promotion

The scheme and mental health promotion

This chapter looks at the Arts and Environment Scheme in terms of its effectiveness as a mental health promotion strategy. One of the initial concerns the evaluation had was the balance between the public art and environment aspects of the scheme, and those directly addressing mental health promotion. It is a truism to state that VicHealth's core business is health promotion and not public art. Therefore, it is important to investigate whether the intention of the scheme was fulfilled when it was implemented in the eight local government areas.

Local government applies for and receives funding from a wide range of sources. Councils have their own agendas. However, VicHealth expects there will be sufficient synergies between these agendas and the intentions of the Arts and Environment Scheme. This may not always occur. The level of integrity between the current scheme and its local implementation is particularly important because mental health promotion is not normally associated with the core business of local government. This is often an issue of nomenclature because community and social wellbeing are central to the work of local government.

The chapter argues that all of the projects dealt well with mental health promotion, particularly through the key determinant of social connectedness. Social connectedness characterised the consultative and participatory aspects of the scheme. It was also embodied in the nature and placement of the creative work undertaken. Some works themselves addressed the theme of social connectedness. The other two social determinants of freedom from discrimination and violence and economic participation were present but less strongly evident in the scheme.

In some sites, the concept of mental health promotion was hardly mentioned and the projects became part of an overall commitment to community building. In others, though, a public discourse around the promotion of mental health and wellbeing was a key feature and part of the scheme's longer term impact.

The chapter is presented in three sections:

- The challenge of *mental* health promotion.
- The projects and social connectedness.
- Accommodation of diversity and economic participation.

The challenge of *mental* health promotion

Mental health promotion is a difficult concept for many people to grasp. It can be associated with mental illness and therefore carry considerable stigma. VicHealth has, of course, tried to capture and redefine the concept by placing the emphasis on *health* rather than the *illness*. As an organisation, it has not resiled from the view that mental health promotion is part of its core business. Through its funding schemes, it has also argued that mental health promotion is part of the core business of community health centres, youth services, human service providers, sports and arts organisations, educational institutions and local government.

VicHealth has taken a broad definition of mental health and has placed its health promotion efforts 'upstream' by focusing on broad social determinants of mental health. Consequently, VicHealth has sought to shift the mental health territory from its illness focus. It has also argued that mental health should be promoted to all of the community and not simply to those who might benefit from early intervention because they are at a specific risk of developing an illness.

VicHealth has not only encouraged the professionals in the field of mental illness to think in health promotion terms, but has also questioned the community's understanding of mental health. A more general term such as 'health and wellbeing' could have been used to cover the same area as described in the *Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002* (MHPP) and the *Foundation Document*. This term, arguably, would have been easier and more acceptable to those groups funded to implement the plan.

However, the use of the term mental health promotion was a deliberate strategy to claim mental health as a common resource for communities and individuals to live well. There was also an effort in the above documents to marshal the research literature to demonstrate the interconnectedness and interdependency of mental and physical health. The MHPP has been a radical document that argued for a new perspective on health and the ways in which it could be promoted.

As mentioned, three social determinants of mental health were emphasised within the MHPP. These comprised:

• Social connectedness.

• Freedom from discrimination and violence and acceptance of diversity.

• Economic participation.

One of the important aspects of these determinants was that they were expressed in the language of the community and human services sectors that VicHealth has traditionally funded. These determinants made the concept of mental health promotion accessible. Although each determinant enabled the MHPP to be understood and implemented, social connectedness received the greatest emphasis. This will be explored in more detail later in the chapter.

The focus on mental health was addressed in the Arts and Environment Scheme in different ways across the eight sites. In a small number of sites, the concept of mental health was central to the whole project and informed all of the processes. The term was used and explained, and the project had an educative function for local government officers, members of the community and artists. Part of the significance of the scheme was the development of public discourse about mental health promotion. Using the process of community building to name and claim mental health was important.

For example, in the City of Greater Dandenong, part of the community consultation involved people being asked to bring along something that contributed to their mental health. The people chose things with a high level of symbolic content. They were symbolic in the sense that each object was more than itself; it represented the person's life experience.

In some cases, the person chose highly personal symbols.

In other cases, the choice was more obviously linked to a cultural and shared tradition.

Other people stressed their relationships as critical in the maintenance of their health by bringing photographs of their families to the workshops.

These objects were 'relational' in the sense that they were part of a web of meaning that connected the individual with others. The objects were an expression of community. (They also became the catalysts for more community building because they were used to share stories between the project's participants.)

In a couple of sites, there was an effort to engage mental illness services. In the first instance, this seemed to occur because of a misunderstanding of the scheme's focus. However, as the project developed, their involvement and input was particularly valuable. The project had the effect of redefining and expanding the conception of mental health promotion. In addition, the presence of these services ensured the focus on mental health was not lost in either generalised notions of community building or the creation of a sense of place through changes to the public environment.

In other sites, mental health promotion was hardly mentioned because of the stigma associated with mental illness. An important reason for this was that some of the sites had been chosen because they were seen as disadvantaged already and carried some stigma as places within their municipality. Singling out the locations as needing special attention, in terms of mental health, was seen as reinforcing the stigma and prejudice that existed.

In these sites, community building for wellbeing was the keynote. There was an effort to build a sense of community through consultation, engagement in the project, and the planning and development of public environments and art. The scheme as a whole and the particular projects were not differentiated from a range of other community capacity building and community development programs that are currently available. While this scheme will result in changes to public space, the processes of community engagement are the same as many other programs.

Local government is very comfortable with these processes. In Golden Plains, for example, part of the scheme's success was its ability to run parallel to the existing processes of 'town place planning' that are a feature of the shire. The shire is committed to working closely with communities in terms of planning and creating environments that reflect and develop the identity of each location.

People are engaged in a planning process and landscape design that results in changes to the streetscapes or other public amenities. Relatively modest amounts of money are provided to implement the plans. Consultation based on engagement and active planning that also involves a range of local government officers is a feature of this shire. Part of the success is that the consultation leads to practical outcomes.

The Arts and Environment Scheme was able to use similar processes and fitted neatly within this overall strategy and commitment. It was an excellent model in which cultural development, public amenity and planning as an expression of community wishes came together. At an explicit level, though, mental health promotion and the three determinants tended to take a secondary role.

The scheme demonstrated that mental health promotion can be directly addressed. Naming mental health promotion challenges the current discourse about mental illness and has an educative function. This set the context for the scheme. The generic processes of community building were still important, but they were applied within this context. The value of the three determinants of mental health was that they provided a link between current practices of community building and the existing rhetoric of community development and the broader concept of mental health.
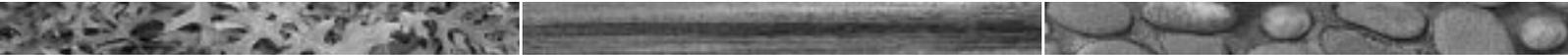
The projects and social connectedness

As mentioned, of the three determinants, social connectedness tended to receive the greatest emphasis. It was a central feature within each site. This was particularly the case in terms of the processes pursued and the ways in which projects engaged and worked with communities. However, the ways in which environments were transformed and the nature of public art as a statement of community identity and celebration also meant that social connectedness was central. In some sites, the form and function of the artworks mirrored the scheme's intention.

Community engagement and social connectedness

Part of the scheme's requirements was for local government to engage, consult and work with the community in the conceptualisation and, in some cases, the manufacture of public art. In each site, there were considerable efforts to work with the local community.

Art, and particularly public art is sometimes seen as an unnecessary luxury, and one that communities can ill-afford in the face of other funding priorities. In the 2002 state election, for example, *The Age*[27] reported one of the major political parties being critical of public art:

> *The National Party has called for an indefinite suspension of taxpayers' money being used to acquire public artwork while the state suffers from drought. National Party leader Peter Ryan said public art funding was a waste while the drought continued and the money should be redirected towards relief. He said that, while art had its place, in times of suffering the government had to get its priorities right. He said he was referring to public acquisitions and not the cost of running galleries or existing projects.*

Controversy seems to go with the territory. In another article headed 'The trouble with public art' *The Age*[28] reported:

> *Chris McAuliffe, art historian and director of the Ian Potter Museum of Art, says public art causes controversy throughout the Western world because people feel they have no say in the way urban environments are controlled and privatised. "Public sculpture," McAuliffe says, "becomes the whipping boy for a whole lot of other resentments."*

Protest about public art can be seen as a protest about who owns or shapes Melbourne. Either that, or we have simply been choosing the wrong art.

One of the scheme's successes was such controversy was avoided in most sites because community commitment was built into the projects. This had the effect of bringing people together and enabling them to interact in ways that were out of the ordinary. Participating in the project enabled individuals to connect as a community as they worked together on a common project. Their engagement also defused any potential criticism that might have existed because a public art and creative environment project was seen as unnecessary, wasteful or precious. In Golden Pains, some communities that were originally sceptical of the scheme put pressure on the council to be included in the scheme once they had seen the results elsewhere.

The level of community commitment and engagement in project activity occurred for a number of reasons. Project staff went out into the communities rather than expecting communities to come to them. For example, in Golden Plains, the council worker and artist placed themselves outside the general store on a Saturday morning because most people came into the town to buy a newspaper. In Port Phillip, interactive displays were set up in the libraries throughout the city because they were meeting places. A number of projects worked with schools and used this as leverage to engage parents.

---

[27] November 21, 2002.

[28] March 21, 2002.

Consultation with the community has often been part of the development of public artworks. However, through the scheme, the timing of this has changed. In the past, artists have tended to develop the concept of the work in consultation with the funder or other key stakeholders. Once the broad parameters of the work had been set, the concept would be presented to the community.

In most of the current sites, consultation occurred much earlier and for a different purpose. In the projects, consultation was more a process of engagement in defining what was important in their community. The artists developed their concept for the project on the basis of this community input. The process was a dialogue, and the artists' skill was in seeing the visual and sculptural possibilities within the views of the community.

The dialogue between the communities and the artists had particular characteristics that were important to the artworks that were eventually created. Most communities were engaged in an artistic process. They were cast almost as artists. Workers often used the phrase that communities were being asked to 'tell their stories'. Story telling is a process of selection from the available information, shaping this to give it a particular form, and presenting it in a way that resonates with other people's experiences.

The process struck a fine balance between the personal and the public. Individuals were encouraged to tell their stories, and these were treated as valuable contributions that could be distilled into a public work that could encapsulate a community's experience. Personal narratives became the building blocks for larger questions of 'what makes this place significant?' or 'why is our town unique?' The personal connection was always maintained in the bigger picture of the project.

Stories, in this respect, act as metaphors. They are interesting and engaging in themselves, but they also resonate with other people's experiences by implying broader themes. A personal story about one man on Station Pier meeting a boat that contains the young woman he will marry is also a story about migration and beginning new lives more generally.

Stories were not confined to language. Facility with language is often related to levels of educational attainment and particular forms of cultural competence. Language can exclude rather than include people. In addition, as Michael Polanyi put it: 'We always know more than we can say'.[29] There was an effort in many of the projects to find different ways of enabling people to reflect on their experiences and their relationship with the environment. For example, in Port Phillip, people were encouraged to take photographs. One woman's mother was a migrant some 50 years ago. She possessed a series of photographs of her mother taken around St Kilda in the 1950s. She revisited the same places and had her own photograph taken at these sites. Her photographic story was deeply personal and a commentary on changes in architecture, fashion and morés.

The same processes of selection, shaping and representation employed in story telling were also used in the photographs. The importance of the community as 'tellers of tales' was underlined by the use of these photographs. Displays were made in the local libraries, and a number of the photographs were used in a variety of council publications.

The combination of the visual with the written word was powerfully demonstrated when the project set up aerial photographs of the suburbs in libraries, and visitors were invited to write a few comments on small tags and pin them to the photograph. Many of these simply pinpointed the person's house, but others told short stories of why the place had been chosen. Other people read these stories and contributed their own. Individuals claimed their part of the municipality.

---

[29] Polanyi, M 1964, *Personal knowledge*, Harper, New York.

X marks the memory
make your mark

The artworks and plaques that were ultimately developed in Port Phillip were further symbols of the processes in which the communities had been engaged. There was a sense that the works were underpinned by a large number of individual stories.

The artists engaged by the City of Banyule, Site Office and Particle, began their consultation process by 'gridding' the park that was the site of the project. This is a traditional technique used by painters in preparing their canvas. The message conveyed was that the park was the canvas for the work. It also enabled people who use the park as a pathway to the station to look at the space in a totally new way. As a strategy to get people talking, it was extraordinarily successful. People stopped and discussed the project. There was also a delegation of locals who did not want the park altered.

The photograph shows the placement of the white lines that created the grid.

Balloons were added and oranges were distributed to further engage commuters and residents.
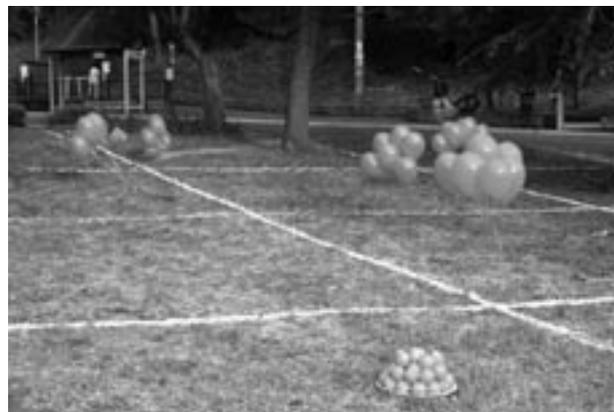
The process of working with communities was not an extra to the creation of the artwork; it was central. The works were expressions of the communities. As the worker at the City of Yarra explained, the project was not about creating a 'cosmetic cheeriness' on the estate; nor was it a way of imposing middle-class tastes to make the physical environment more aesthetically pleasing. Rather, the aim was to establish an ongoing process whereby tenants have an impact on their physical environment, ask questions related to their circumstances, and tell of their experiences in a way that brings them closer to their neighbours.

Advertising the scheme and the projects was an ongoing task and this contributed to the social connectedness of the community. The local press, council newsletters and small-scale community publications were used. Port Phillip had a permanent spot about the project in the bimonthly newsletter to all residents. Many photographs that had been taken as part of the project were also used throughout the newsletter. The City of Yarra worked with the Ministry of Housing to create a strong sense of community on the estate by highlighting the arts project in the newsletter.

Finally, the use of food was a very effective strategy to build social connectedness. Banyule and Casey used a sausage sizzle to bring people together to talk about the project, and to look at the designated site for the work in a new way. The space became a place of celebration where people met and talked. In Greater Dandenong, people were invited to bring food to share as part of the consultation process. Preparing and sharing food is deeply embedded in most cultures as an important way of creating social connections. Food is a basic human need, but sharing food is also symbolic of trust, openness, generosity and interdependency. The projects used this to great effect.

Public art and social connectedness

The arts have traditionally been seen as a way of bringing people together and creating a sense of community. This is achieved, in part, because works of art are able to embody the experiences of diverse people. Individual experience is expressed in a way that is common, public and shareable. Participating in the arts is being part of a community because *different* people find the *same* work meaningful.

In all of the projects, this occurred in two ways. The first dealt with the ways in which the community was engaged, as explained above. The second will be the continuing impact on the space that the finished works will have in the future. All the projects worked to engage members of the community to re-look at the environment, negotiate an appropriate artwork and, in some cases, become involved in its manufacture. The artworks were also designed to be permanent features of the environment. As such, the work will change the spaces for many people in the community, most of whom will not have been directly involved in the project.

In Golden Plains, a set of seats was created in a number of different towns. These seats are strategically placed so people will sit and talk. The artworks are new meeting places for the people of the town and for visitors to the area. Similarly, the shopkeepers and local residents of Autumn Place in the City of Casey said they wanted their site to act as a drawcard for the small shopping centre.

The works can also create a *virtual* community in that people who use the space feel as if their individual experience and the collective experience of the community are represented (in the sense of re-presented) through the work. The works act as a shared symbol for many people's experiences. They enable the person to feel connected to other people who interact with or find the works meaningful. In the City of Port Phillip, a set of sculptures was completed that embody the stories of the people who have been consulted in that area. The sculptures, though, have references that are wider than these local narratives. One of the sculptures is a pair of bronze overalls and a pair of boots. Although these refer to a particular local identity, the work also embodies many people's experiences of being at the beach and leaving their clothes while they go and have a swim.

For Mt Alexander Shire, this sense of connectedness lay at the core of their project. The project was designed to find a way of understanding the history and impact of European settlement on the environment that was implied in the opening of a history and nature trail between Chewton and Castlemaine. Environment and history were completely intertwined in the motivation for, development and execution of the project. A key photograph was of the weeds that lined the banks of the creek. The natural environment had been degraded over many years and weeds were now the dominant vegetation. The work was designed to enable visitors to see how the search for gold had transformed the natural environment. The natural flooding of the creek now had a different impact on the environment. The following photographs document the various stages of the project.

The sculptural installation makes reference to the long history of the scouring of the creek bed, and the relatively recent savage use of pipe work and water-jets using to reduce the creek to rubble in the hunt for gold. As well as reflecting the environment, it is also designed to be changed by its environment as the creek floods and pieces of the work are dislodged and move through the creek bed.

Social connectedness was also embodied in and expressed by the other artworks in the various sites. Each was a statement of community identity. Three of the seats in Golden Plains are instructive and are used here as examples.

Local farm implements were used in Corindhap to create two seats and a table. They have a direct connection to the farming community and the use of the land in agriculture.

Artist: Bronwen Gray

Their age suggests the past, and this is reflected in the rotunda (also in the park) and the two sculptures of light horsemen from the First World War.

The historical resonance is reinforced through the binary opposites of 'work' and 'rest'. The implements have been abandoned and are now objects of repose that people use to break their journey. The same contrast is evident in the two soldier figures. One is dynamic and charging in battle; the other keeps a silent guard over the living and dead.

People who use the seats participate in the history of the location, and are part of the dynamic tension of work and rest.

In Rokewood, the seat is in the form of a ram's horn. It suggests the use of the land for pastoral and grazing purposes. Just as people sit on the ram's horn chair, Australia too once rode on the sheep's back. There is a neatness about such clichés. From a distance, the seat is a confined and undifferentiated structure that shines in the sunlight.

Artist: Bronwen Gray

Australia's history, though, is not a unitary story; it is a mosaic of many narratives. The seat reflects this. It is faced with individual tiles that have been personally decorated. The big picture is comprised of small stories. The chosen materials do not blend into the landscape. They are imposed on it in much the same way as sheep were imported and changed the nature of the landscape and defined the country.

The third work has more obvious links with its immediate surrounds. It is in a picnic area in Inverleigh. The work comprises a table and seats hewn from a single tree and supported on stone plinths. There is a roughness and natural quality that echoes the environment. Although the tops of the table and seats are smooth, it is as if nature has weathered it in its own way over years. The canopy under which the work sits is more obviously artificial, but this, too, will weather with time and take on a patina that reflects the colours in the landscape. The work is monumental and takes its place among the standing trees in the picnic area.

Artist: Glenn Romanis

On closer scrutiny, though, the natural form of the wood is incised with a series of strong lines. These are reminiscent of the contours of the land and the nearby river or a body that has been decorated through scarification.

There is an ancient feel about the work and the lines map the physical and temporal territory in ways that cannot quite be explained.

The important thing about all of the works in the scheme is that they endowed their environment with significance through a sophisticated selection of forms and materials. Part of this significance is to distil the stories of the communities that worked on their conception. More broadly, though, they form a link between the environment, the communities that have inhabited that environment and people who come into it, even for a short period. The works embody the social connections between people.

Metaphors for social connectedness

Public environments and art, as argued above, can embody people's history, experiences and hopes and, therefore, contribute to a community's sense of its identity. It does not necessarily have to address social connectedness explicitly.

However, in four of the local government areas involved in the scheme, the works themselves have become metaphors for social connectedness. The form and function of the artworks mirror the scheme's intention. In Golden Plains, the artworks were mostly seats where people can meet and talk. The table created in Greater Dandenong is a metaphor for diverse people coming together and sharing a meal or engaging with the objects that are placed upon it. One of the original ideas in the City of Yarra was also to create a workbench that would be focal point for people to come together to create further pieces of art. Tables are about sharing. In the City of Casey, the sculpture is in the form of a shelter and gateway into a particular shopping and community precinct. The implicit idea is that diverse people can be enveloped and brought together under a single structure.

Accommodation of diversity and economic participation

The two other determinants, valuing diversity and economic participation, received less attention in the scheme. However, most projects were strong on the former because they concentrated on engaging people who were marginalised in significant ways and who do not normally have a voice in public space planning.

The groups targeted in Port Phillip included the elderly Russian community, the homeless, young people, public housing tenants and people with disabilities. These people were seen as being left out of significant decisions being made in the city that had an impact on their lives. The project, entitled *Margins, memories and markers*, was designed to validate and celebrate their life experiences.

In Greater Dandenong, participants were engaged through the English language centre. Many of these people were new arrivals and were part of the Indo-Chinese community. People recently arrived in Australia were one of the target groups designated in the MHPP. The Foundation document specifically mentions that priority should be given to activities that provide access to formal and informal support networks, and enhance the capacity of ethnic and host communities to provide social contact and support.

As mentioned, the project in the City of Yarra was undertaken in partnership with the Ministry of Housing and was based on the Collingwood housing estate. The project was one part of a larger initiative to develop the arts of the estate. The project involved an established Indigenous group of artists and marginalised young people. There have been efforts to create a mentor relationship between these groups that will enhance the project's sustainability by using successful role models. In the case of the young people, the project developed as a formal training opportunity through a partnership with RMIT University.

Part of the experience of being marginalised is that people do not have a social and public position that is valued and recognised in the community. The Robinvale project (Rural City of Swan Hill) has concentrated on young people who are seen as the most difficult and disconnected from their community.

In all cases, the projects have helped the individuals and groups involved to occupy a valued social position. This has been, in part, the result of a public celebration of their work through an official launch of the project, as illustrated in the following photograph. Celebration and public recognition have been important because they enabled participants to look back with some pride on their achievements, and to use these successes as a springboard for future action.

Although economic participation was not the primary focus of any project, the scheme had a number of indirect economic spin-offs and raised some issues that may need to be considered in the future.

In Golden Plains, the seats that were created are in a number of small towns dotted throughout the shire. There were discussions about creating a tourist trail through the shire and giving the works some prominence in the ways the towns identify and promote themselves. For example, people and tourist buses are now stopping in Corindhap because of the seats and war sculptures. Creating a context around the works has been a successful strategy in promoting the them.

The Casey site was a small shopping strip, and a number of the retail outlets were empty at the beginning of the project. There were efforts to engage all the stakeholders, including the retailers. Part of the strategy was to demonstrate that building a sense of community is valuable in different ways. The traders willingly participated in, and have been enthusiastic about, the project because of the potential benefits to their businesses if more people use the space on a regular basis. The project's contribution to economic activity also underpinned the initial application for the Robinvale project. Although the economic imperative should not have driven the projects, when synergies between different interests were exploited, the projects were more likely to be supported and successful.

Most local governments have economic development units that are expert in seeing the economic possibilities in local enterprises. However, there was little evidence that the projects made contact with this arm of their councils. There could be some benefit, for example, in offering training sessions or briefings for local artists so they are better able to compete with non-local artists who are more experienced at tendering for and undertaking large public art or environmental works.

One of the unexpected consequences of the scheme was the amount of work provided to community artists. Such people are often severely economically disadvantaged in our society. As demonstrated above, public art is not universally considered to be a good thing. It can be seen as an expensive waste of money. There are few commissions that use public money and these are often funded at fairly low levels. By community arts standards, these projects were well funded.

There was though a significant difference among the sites in terms of the funding of each work (as opposed to each site). The number of works being created varied considerably. In those sites where a single work was created, the artists were well remunerated. Some sites, though, created multiple works. In Port Phillip, for example, council contributed considerably more money to the project in addition to the VicHealth grant. However, there were sites where the grant was spread thinly between a number of artists, all of whom were required to create a range of works. The rationale was that the community would only accept the project if fairly modest amounts of money were spent. There was some evidence that such dilution of the grant caused considerable economic hardship to the artists involved, even though the resulting artwork was of a high standard. Community artists are not always astute business people.

By way of summary, the scheme has made a significant contribution to mental health promotion, particularly through the development of social connectedness. Social connectedness was evident through the processes of engagement of, consultation with and participation by the community. Social connectedness was also embedded in the nature of the artworks that were created as part of the scheme.

The projects led by example. Mental health promotion was implicit in all the work in each site. However, the explicit notion of *mental* health promotion could still have been strengthened within the scheme so the rationale for the development of public art and the creative transformation of environments could be apparent and part of the public discourse in which stakeholders engage. Therefore, the scheme had an educative function, particularly for local government. This will be addressed in the next chapter.

3

Working
with local
government

Working with local government

In this chapter, the scheme's impact on the eight councils that were funded will be explored under the headings of:

- Making an investment with local government.

- Working differently in councils and the impact on municipal health plans.

- Seeing public art differently within local government

Making an investment with local government

The scheme was designed to work with local governments to enhance the physical environment. The aim was to contribute to positive health outcomes for communities who use that environment. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the scheme was one part of the implementation of the MHPP. Consequently, the health outcomes are cast in terms of social connectedness, celebrating diversity (or expressed negatively: 'freedom from discrimination and violence'), and economic participation. The scheme was successful in these terms.

The scheme was predicated on a view that public space has a public health dimension. Public space is intimately involved in defining a community's sense of itself and how individuals belong to, and are part of, a particular place. The health dimension is not confined to the use of space, but also incorporates its design and realisation. The view is that people who use public space should have some involvement in its design, and this will enhance their sense of belonging and community. Social connectedness and sense of community, in turn, make people more healthy.

Traditionally public spaces have been planned and designed by professionals employed by councils who have relied exclusively on their skills. The Arts and Environment Scheme sought to open up this process to include participation from artists, other workers from within council, and members of the broader community. Part of the stated rationale was that 'creative and participatory approaches to the design and development of public spaces have a beneficial outcome for the community'. Such benefits might include a greater level of ownership of, identification with, use and pride in the community's public spaces.

This is particularly important for groups who are marginalised. One major expression of marginalisation is that people become alienated from public spaces that are ostensibly designed for the whole community. Public environments and art, as pursued in the scheme can, therefore, make a positive contribution to a sense of community.

In the short term, VicHealth funded local government to enhance the environment mainly through the creative activity and public art by employing processes of community consultation and participation. The idea was that the art will transform the environment, make it more amenable to public use, and reinforce a sense of community not only for those people who were involved in its planning, but also for those use the space as part of their everyday activities. The artwork was also meant to function as a point of interest and therefore attract people to the environment.

In the longer term, VicHealth was trying to influence local government to strengthen (or, in some cases, create) the links between the planning and making of public space and health. Public space is primarily the responsibility of local government; however, it is normally seen in ways other than health. From council's perspective, public space is often viewed mainly in recreational, commercial, aesthetic or safety terms. The scheme aimed to reinforce the health dimension.

The influence that VicHealth was trying to exert has substantive and procedural aspects. The substantive issues of the scheme included artworks, landscaping and changes to the environment that serve to define and characterise public spaces. These works and spaces should be expressions of the people who visit them. The spaces should also be welcoming, friendly and used by diverse groups of people. At a council level, there should be a range of policies and structures that support:

- Community consultation.
- Joint planning between different arms of local government.
- Public space that is considered in terms of its ability to promote health.

These policies and structures should be underpinned by a well-argued rationale that demonstrates the links between art, public place planning and a community's health. For some councils, these substantive issues are major challenges because they represented a new orientation to urban planning, public art and health.

Procedurally, the scheme turned the substantive issues into reality. For example, the scheme promoted dialogue between council workers, particularly between those who had responsibility for health, cultural development and strategic planning. Part of the dialogue concerned the development of a language and rhetoric about mental health promotion. Negotiations regarding the artwork, and the planning of public space more generally, need to be framed in terms of the potential mental health benefits for the community.

In the Arts and Environment Scheme, the artworks (or work) was the means for the above procedures to be modelled and the substantive issues achieved. VicHealth used the development of the artwork as leverage to fulfil its broader agenda of embedding the link between public space and public health. This link was implicit within the scheme. There would be some value, though, in stating it more boldly, particularly in terms of what was expected substantially from local government.

As will be argued through this chapter, the scheme was successful procedurally and, to some extent, substantially. However, the latter successes were in those local government areas where the councils already had a strong understanding of, and commitment to, the ideas that underpinned the scheme. In these cases, the substantive ideas have been enhanced through the councils' involvement in the scheme, and the scheme acted as a catalyst for further work. The rationale for working with communities to create pieces of art and more welcoming public spaces has become more sophisticated because of the contact with VicHealth and the ideas contained within the MHPP.

In other sites, the scheme's impact was much more modest. The projects were successful in their own terms: the community was consulted, the environment was transformed, and there was some dialogue between the various stakeholders at a local government level. However, the project tended to be seen as an end in itself, rather than as the means to the ends outlined above. In these cases, the project was successful as a defined intervention but it was unlikely to have a longer term impact regarding council's structures and policies.

From the councils' point of view, the scheme was a success. They saw the work variously as:

- An **opportunity** to extend the existing cultural and artistic commitments of council, such as in Port Phillip.
- A **catalyst** for change to build partnerships with other community stakeholders, such as the work in Banyule.
- An **impetus** to undertake a range of other initiatives, such as improved lighting or the creation of safer pathways, as has occurred in Greater Dandenong.
- A **focus** for a collective effort to revitalise a mix of community and private assets, as happened in Autumn Place in Casey.

Working differently in councils and the impact on municipal health plans

The projects acted as a catalyst to work more collaboratively within councils in each site. This meant interdepartmental cooperation and included information sharing, joint planning and dividing tasks. This is a fairly unusual approach within local government where most activities are organised and pursued within discrete 'silos'. Where services and departments are separated, cultural development is marginalised and not seen as having the same importance as other functions of council. In a more integrated approach, the various functions are seen as interdependent. Each area enhances the others.

The funding source itself underpinned the need for collaboration. VicHealth is obviously concerned about public health. The funding for the project, in most cases, was placed within the cultural development department. The immediate link was drawn between the two areas of local government involvement.

In practical terms, the link was manifest through the establishment of project steering committees. These were comprised of key stakeholders, including individuals who were responsible for public health in the council. This, though, was not universal. The projects' steering committees were more likely to include community service personnel and strategic planners than public health workers. These links could be strengthened in the future.

However, there were a number of examples where workers used the project to forge formal links with the municipal health planners, and the project provided the catalyst for this to occur. When the health planners were directly involved, they developed a greater understanding of the need for mental health promotion and how the creation of public art and the management of public space could make a positive contribution. The cultural development workers were then seen as important stakeholders in the processes associated with public health.

Some cultural workers were invited to have input into re-drafting their municipality's health policies and plans. In Greater Dandenong, for example, the arts worker was invited onto the municipal health subcommittee that was set up to review their current plan. The new plan included mental health and wellbeing as a substantive area that should be addressed. It also identified the need to respond to those issues that are important to the community as way of addressing the issue of mental health. As the worker pointed out, the arts and environment project was a practical demonstration of how these commitments could be implemented successfully. The project was the example on which new policies were developed and strategies for working with the community to promote health were defined.

In other sites, the project fitted neatly within an existing structure in which cultural development was already integrated with health, strategic planning and community development. The City of Port Phillip has, for a number of years, used public art as a way of defining community, and creating a sense of belonging, local identity and social connectedness between individuals. Although the project did not create totally new ways of working within council, it did reinforce the existing commitments. The project also had the effect of legitimising the way of working within council and to the community. Receiving funding from VicHealth, of course, had practical benefits. It also, though, had a symbolic impact because it provided considerable external recognition that was used to consolidate the position of the cultural development department.

VicHealth designed the scheme for the transformation of public space to act as a vehicle to integrate the various arms of local government. It was particularly well suited to achieve this because public art and the transformation of public environments necessitates collaboration between diverse stakeholders. The scale of a public work, as well as the infrastructure required to commission and oversee its construction, requires an ensemble approach to its development. The collaborative process lends itself to spheres of influence that otherwise would normally not exist in the making of art. The image of an autonomous artist pursuing their personal vision does not sit well with the current scheme.
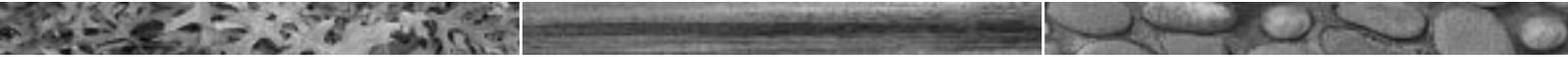
Seeing public environments and art differently within local government

An important impact of the scheme has been that councils are now looking at public environments and public art in particular in a very different light. Traditionally, public art has been seen almost exclusively in decorative terms. Artworks were designed to be aesthetically pleasing and, in many cases, inoffensive. Sometimes, public art was seen as having an educative or polemical function. However, public art with an overtly political message does not have a strong history in this country. Messages tend to be more subtle, such as those carried by the war memorials that exist in most country towns.[30]

The scheme made a major contribution to councils seeing art as an expression of community. The emphasis is now on engaging the community in decisions that determine how public space is used. The works that are created are meant to define communities, express their identity, and resonate with people's experiences. The works are repositories of the lives and stories of people who live in and use the spaces.

In the City of Port Phillip, this was made explicit, even in the name of the project: *Margins, memories and markers*. This said something about who was involved and the purpose of the project. The city has always been home to very diverse groups of people, many of whom were marginalised in some way because of their economic status, disabilities, sexual orientation or cultural background. The project functioned as a forum for them to record their stories and their connection with localities within the city. These became the bases of the six artworks and 28 plaques that were dotted throughout the municipality. The works and plaques acknowledge, value and mark the lives of the people who have lived in, and been part of, the communities. The works are part of the collective memory of the city.

One of the scheme's more unexpected outcomes was the way it has raised the level of discourse about public art. This started with the cultural development officer because of their everyday engagement with their project; it then extended to other council workers. One cultural development worker said that not only had her involvement in the VicHealth scheme expanded her understanding of health, but it had also given her a much more complex view of public art. She said that she no longer saw a work as simply 'just a piece of public sculpture'. She now had a strong desire to incorporate a social benefit into any artwork. The scheme was a major opportunity for professional development.

Some of the insights gained through the project were formalised in the development or reworking of a public art policy. The scheme has made an important contribution in this area. In the City of Yarra, for example, engaging the community in major decisions that have an impact on their living environment is now given prominence. The emphasis on community involvement in the conceptualisation, development and placement of artwork was common across sites and is likely to characterise projects in the future. The City of Banyule is developing a public art strategy into which a range of council officers and departments have had an input.

The City of Greater Dandenong developed a public art framework that promoted the principles of innovation, collaboration and consultation, excellence, diversity and pride of place. The development and implementation of this framework ran parallel to their involvement in the scheme. This work has been extended into the development of a broader cultural framework that is based on the five pillars of:

- Pride.
- Identity.
- Engagement.
- Knowledge and innovation.
- Wellbeing.

---

[30] See Inglis, KS assisted by Brazier, J 1998, *Sacred places: war memorials in the Australian landscape*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University, Carlton, Victoria.

These pillars are completely consistent with the intentions of the Arts and Environment Scheme. There are currently efforts to implement this framework at the corporate planning level of council. If successful, this framework will be applied to all major decisions in the city.

By way of summary, the scheme was very successful in a number of ways. In all the projects, the scheme was used to build the community by engaging people in the development of artworks, and using those works to give a new sense of their identity. Other arms of local government are taking up these processes so consultation with the community is becoming an interactive dialogue.

Although the projects were less successful in affecting policy changes regarding municipal public health planning, less formal changes were occurring. The project engaged a range of council workers and these people were starting to use the MHPP's rhetoric and the scheme's processes in their work. Cultural development was moved to a more central position within the eight councils.

Involvement in the scheme was a major form of professional development not only for the project workers but also, through the seminars, for a range of other workers in and with local government. The language of mental health promotion provided an additional rationale for cultural development, and helped consolidate its position as central to local government.

Three visual case studies

Three visual case studies

The Arts and Environment Scheme is, in part, about the relationship a community has with its environment. Issues of scale, accessibility, amenability, liveability and aesthetics are all of critical importance. One of the scheme's aims is to enhance a sense of community by ensuring environments are welcoming and used by a wide variety of people, particularly those who are marginalised or vulnerable.

Public artwork contributes to this by enhancing the aesthetic quality of a space in that it appeals to the senses. The space is 'felt' to be more satisfying, beautiful or interesting. The space is made 'special' for a community. This 'specialness' is derived in two ways. First, in all of the eight sites, members of the community were involved in reflecting on their environment, creating images of what it *might* look like, contributing to the physical change, and celebrating the results. Their direct involvement enhanced their connection with the environment and with each other. Direct connection builds ownership and pride, and collective ownership is an expression of community.

Artist: Geoff Hogg

Second, the work symbolises people's individual and collective experiences of living in a particular place and time. Symbols are important because they encapsulate many meanings and enable people to 'hold in their mind' things that were previously unformed or only 'half-known'. The artwork created in Greater Dandenong carries meanings that are experienced but cannot be satisfactorily reduced to words. The work implies a sense of togetherness through the form of the table, sharing through the bowl, and personal decoration and significance in the beads. Such a reduction, however, is inadequate to represent the whole.

Artist: Geoff Hogg

The evaluation has tried to capture the symbolic nature of the scheme by using methods of data collection and analysis that parallel or reflect the processes of making art. There was an effort to direct attention to, and understand the meanings that were inherent in the spatial and visual aspects of being involved in the scheme. The working assumption was that reflecting on the visual aspects of the work would reveal meanings and lead to an understanding of the project that may not be fully understood by more conventional means of narrative. Imagery is another way of 'telling the story' of the project that is complementary to, but different from, the story that can be told through language.

Each project was asked to keep a visual record of their work over the 12 or 18 months of their involvement in the scheme. They were encouraged to take many photographs over the time so they had a comprehensive archive. This archive could be used for later reflection and analysis. They were also encouraged to collect many images and not simply record those things they felt were important. The idea was that significance would emerge from the photographs rather than being imposed on them. The projects were given an introduction to photographic analysis and provided with some extracts from the research literature that presented information on how photographs could be analysed.

Having taken a great many photos, projects were asked to select a small number that encapsulated their project's significant aspects. The images were meant not simply to illustrate what went on; the selection of the photographs and juxtaposition of one against another in a photographic essay was seen as a form of analysis.

Photographs are simultaneously a record of the event and an artificial construct.[31] They have been selected because they are illustrative of a particular event, and they have a symbolic relationship with the whole project. Who is doing the selecting is important. Different stakeholders are likely to select images that are meaningful to them, and meaning is likely to be somewhat subjective. Therefore, projects were asked to complete the selection process a number of times over the course of their involvement in the scheme. They were also asked see it as a group activity rather than a task only for the project worker. The discussions that ensued from the selection process enabled a variety of stakeholders to reflect on their participation in the project.

Projects were asked to cluster images in a number of ways. In some cases, this was sequential; in others, a thematic approach was taken. Photographs taken at different stages in the project were deliberately juxtaposed to make a particular point. While the photos were engaging in their own right, there was an effort to provide a sense of the context to the viewer. Consequently, the images have been supported by some accompanying text. This text is not meant to 'explain' the photograph in the sense of the image and its explanation being identical. The text has been designed to provide another layer of reflection on the scheme's actions.

In this report, three sites have been included, but any council could have been chosen. Three have been selected because of spatial constraints The three illustrate the scheme's comprehensiveness and diversity across different contexts. They also provide an insight into the scheme's impact on the various communities. The text that accompanies the photographs is a compilation of the ideas of the project workers, other participants and the evaluation.

The sites are:

- City of Port Phillip.
- City of Casey.
- City of Yarra.

---

[31] van Leeuwen, T & Jewitt, C (eds) 2001, *Handbook of visual analysis*, Sage Publications, London, p. 5.

The City of Port Phillip

The City of Port Phillip's project was entitled *Margins, memories and markers* (mmm). It focused on marginalised and vulnerable groups within the city. Their memories about their connection to place were the raw material for the projects, and these memories were recorded and celebrated. The results were six major artworks and 28 bronze plaques featuring personal memories and stories dotted throughout the city.

Ilka Tampke, the project worker, wrote the accompanying text to the next set of photographs.

Port Phillip Community Festival, Alma Park, East St Kilda, November 2001

This was the first time that *mmm* project was profiled at a festival. We had already run a couple of workshops and they had had a fairly low attendance rate.

We set up a map of the city and called the display 'memories lost and found'. Festival goers were asked to take a red piece of paper and write something they had lost, or a green bit of paper for something they had found, and pin it to the point on the map where they lost it. We used the prompt questions:

- What have you lost or found in your local neighbourhood?
- Twenty dollars?
- A friend?
- Your dreams?

The display and the process were very popular. Most passers-by added a story and a lot of people stopped to read every single contribution. This day felt like the true 'launch' of the project into public awareness.

Launch of the X marks the memory exhibition – St Kilda Library, Thursday, 16 May 2002

Jennifer Ritchie Jones used photography as part of the memory gathering process to draw out people's connections to place. This was particularly effective with younger people. This image shows Howard Shaw (front) the *Big Issue* seller for Carlisle Street, and Larissa (with wine glass) from Hanover Youth Service celebrating their photos displayed at the launch. Larissa brought a number of her friends to the launch and it was great to have so many young people there. The image captures the pride of these first-time photographers in having their work publicly acknowledged. Both participants also gave readings of their writing at the launch.

This event was a project milestone insofar as it represented the closure of the memory-gathering phase of the project and the commencement of the art-making phase. The St Kilda launch attracted over 120 attendees, far exceeding expectations, which further raised the profile of the project within council and the community.

Mould for Monument on wheels at Perrin Foundry, Cheltenham, February 2003

Bronze caster, Bill Perrin lifts the wax ribbon to reveal the mould that will be used to cast the bronze ribbon for the St Kilda artwork, *Monument on wheels*. This was one of the first works to be installed and, after over 12 months of research and preparation, it was very exciting to see the artworks take actual shape.

This image has as sense of revelation and anticipation. The seeds of the project were finally coming to fruition.

Launch of Maria's story, corner Napier and Church Streets, South Melbourne, March 2003

Indigenous artists Pauline Whyman and Richard Franklin are performing *Maria's story*, which is the basis for the artwork seen behind them. Maria was a local Koori identity and member of the Stolen Generation who had grown up in the South Melbourne Girls' Orphanage (close to this artwork). Pauline read the story of Maria's life and Richard accompanied her on soft acoustic guitar. The performance was moving for all present including the members of the Rainbow Group, an Indigenous recreation and health group who were in attendance at the launch as an outing.

This was the first artwork launch and milestone in the public life of the project.

Launch of Monument on wheels, St Kilda artwork, corner Barkly and Blessington Streets, St Kilda, 27 March 2003

Project participants Howard Shaw and Gavin Tag sit either side of writer/artist Julie Shiels. Howard and Gavin, both members of the Roomers writing project for rooming house residents, gave readings at the launch of *Monument on wheels.* Their first-hand accounts of leading marginalised and transient lives in St Kilda brought the audience closer to an understanding of the intention behind the sculpture. It is to honour the uniqueness and importance of the local characters who form part of the St Kilda streetscape.

Launch of Twenty-seven stories, Elwood artwork, Elwood canal, Sunday, 30 March 2003

This image captures the walking tour of the Elwood artwork led by local historian Meyer Eidelson. Over 40 local community members gathered on a Sunday morning to walk the canal and foreshore, and admire the newly installed stories in the ground and hearing historical background from Meyer. The walk was very special, as the stories seemed to trigger everyone's memories of living or growing up in Elwood. People were chatting and sharing stories as they walked along the path, and there was a strong sense of connectedness among the group. Later, a barbecue lunch was shared on the foreshore.

Launch of Port stories, Port Melbourne artwork, outside the old Port Melbourne lock-up, Saturday, 12 April 2003

The Port Melbourne artwork was launched with a walking tour and community theatre event at which local community groups performed stories and songs based on Port Melbourne's history. One of *mmm*'s most evocative stories, that of the old lock-up, was taken as the inspiration for a song performed by the Bi-Polar Bears, a band for performers with an intellectual disability or mental illness. The song was very popular and it will feature on their next recording project.

Launch of Port stories, Port Melbourne foreshore, Saturday, 12 April 2003

Local community artist, Liz Milsom, was approached to create the decorations for the theatrical walking tour. Liz took rubbings of the mosaic artwork and created this beautiful sheer banner that was hung on the walking route.

The image indicates the ownership and connection that local residents felt to the new artwork in wanting to celebrate it in their own artworks. The lightness of the paint on chiffon contrasts so beautifully with the actual mosaic work in stone and ceramic tile, yet they both communicate the same message. This image also captures the ambience of this autumn evening in Port.
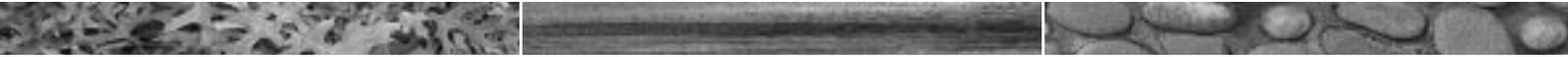
With the walking tour at an end and speeches made, local senior citizen and performer Gavin O'Leary delighted over 100 Port residents with traditional jazz standards accompanied on guitar by Jethro Wardsworth. Port Phillip is a dramatically changing community. However, this launch attracted the highest number of attendees and they displayed the most resilient sense of commitment to love of place and community.

Launch of Tommy's story, Middle Park artwork, Sandbar Café, Wednesday, 16 April 2003

The final local launch, *Tommy's story*, was graced by the presence of two local historians, Pat Grainger (right) and Wendy Lowenstein, author of *Under the hook: Melbourne waterside workers remember working lives and class war, 1900–1980*.

MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS
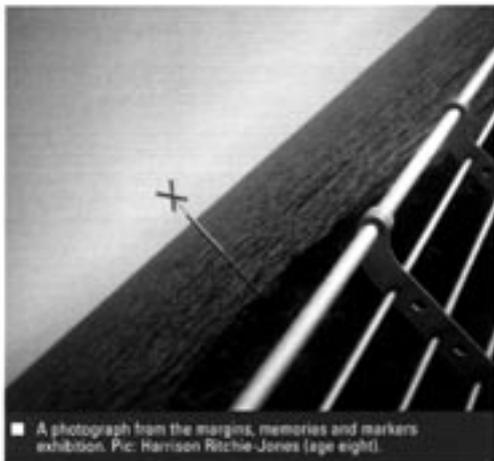
■ A photograph from the margins, memories and markers exhibition. Pic: Harrison Ritchie-Jones (age eight).

Our physical environment can have a profound influence on the way we think, feel and act. The colours around us, the space in which we work, our capacity to be moved by sights and sounds can greatly affect our moods, mindset, identity and sense of belonging.

Community art project margins, memories and markers is a 12-month initiative that embraces this philosophy by addressing community health issues through the development of public art works.

The project is funded by the City of Port Phillip and VicHealth's Art and Environment Scheme.

A series of exhibitions in libraries across the municipality showcased the public artworks planned for each neighbourhood and the community's stories that inspired them.

In total, six works of art will be created across Port Phillip:

■ **Port Melbourne:** a work in glass on the foreshore featuring etched stories

■ **Middle Park:** a work in metal celebrating the wharfies who swam to work

■ **Elwood:** a mosaic border along the gecko trail pathway

■ **St Kilda:** an anti-monument to the street characters of St Kilda

■ **East St Kilda:** a sound installation in Alma Park

■ **South Melbourne:** a contemporary indigenous site-specific work

More than 200 people were involved in creative workshops and contributing memories.

"The workshops yielded a wealth of visual and written material, images and symbols which celebrate place," said Ilka Tampke, the project's coordinator. "The exhibitions showcased this material, specifically including contributions from some of Port Phillip's community groups such as homeless young people, rooming house residents and indigenous communities."

Included in exhibitions were a series of photos taken by participants in workshops conducted by Jen Ritchie-Jones.

"All the photos have a special edge," Jen said. "None of the people involved in taking photos for margins, memories and markers have had any formal training. They shoot their photographs from the heart. They're not bound by convention or rules."

See the margins, memories and markers page on the website at: www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/mmm.html

This description of the project appeared in Divercity – The official newsletter of the City of Port Phillip – halfway through the project
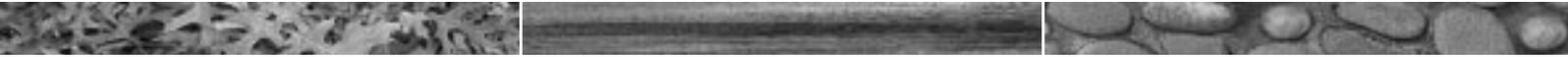
City of Casey

The City of Casey has worked comprehensively to include the three determinants of mental health into their long-term vision and strategic plan. In this way, issues of public health are embedded in all of council's functions. The following photographs focus on the consultative and participatory aspects of the project. The two themes of social connectedness and community building underpinned the Arts and Environment Scheme in Casey and are explored more fully in the photographs.

The project worker, Sue Helmot, and the evaluators contributed the analysis.

Autumn Place provides an important focal point for the people of Doveton and Eumemmerring. It was designed as a place for community-based, social and business-related activities and interactions. Autumn Place fulfils the role of town centre for the local community.

A range of facilities and associated services are currently based at Autumn Place. This includes the Doveton library, the Doveton preschool, the Doveton maternal and child health centre, a supermarket, a strip of speciality shops and town park. A medical centre is soon to be constructed on the site of the former Doveton police station. The concentration of these activities makes Autumn Place such an important community focal point and confers its town centre status.

In recent times, Autumn Place has experienced significant setbacks, most notably the closure of staff-assisted bank services and the closure of the Doveton police station. These events have been accompanied by high tenancy turnover and an increase in shop vacancies. To add to the difficulties, the physical infrastructure itself was ageing considerably. However, the recent completion of extensive streetscape improvement works has counteracted the process of physical deterioration, and enhanced the visual appearance and functional character of the area.

Although, the streetscape works demonstrated council's commitment to improving the quality of life for the Doveton community, this was not enough to bring Autumn Place back to life. It became apparent that there was a need to bring the community together and to engage them directly in shaping their shopping strip, and to tell council how their quality of life could be improved through the physical environment. Engaging the community was a keynote for the scheme in Casey.

The initial consultation

A sausage sizzle was used as a strategy to bring people together to spark interest in the art project. This was organised by council and attended by councillors, the strategic planning department, and cultural development staff. The barbecue set the scene for a celebration of community life and assisted in strengthening the links between council and the community.

The idea was that a barbecue was a way of encouraging people to spend a little time in Autumn Place rather than simply coming in to pick up some supplies and leave. Sharing food was a way of reinforcing a sense of community and providing an opportunity for people to talk together. It also set a positive tone to the event. Instead of being a complaints session, the food helped create a sense of celebration.

From the project's point of view, the event was a forum to pose some 'big' questions, such as: how do the community feel about the environment in which they live, what makes them feel good, and what factors contribute to their feelings of wellbeing?

The artists and council officers consulting on-site

The community celebration was the beginning of the consultation process. It was also the first time that council departments had worked collaboratively in the community on an arts project.

The artists, Grant Finck and Irene Wellm, the arts and cultural development officer, strategic development officers and councillors were all actively engaged in talking with members of the Doveton community. This demonstrated council's commitment to the Doveton community. All stakeholders, including the retailers, were engaged in the project.

Planning can often be dominated by socioeconomic indicators, epidemiological statistics, or employment rates. Although these are useful, they give a particular understanding of a community and do not necessarily provide an insight into the lived experience of that community. The value of taking the project onto the streets was that people were engaged directly. Views that were derived from abstract sources could be challenged. This was a two-way process. Council officials developed a better understanding of the community around Autumn Place, and the community was able 'to put a face' to the council and its processes.

Everyone saw it as a sensational, productive day. It provided:

• The artists with an informal setting to commence consultation and to raise the profile of the arts project.

• Council officers with the experience of directly facing the community and their issues of concern.

• The community with the opportunity to come together to express themselves freely in a non-threatening and non-adversarial setting, and to participate in improving their quality of life.

This was a very valuable and successful beginning to the project.

An art workshop with Doveton Secondary College and artists Grant Finck and Irene Wellm
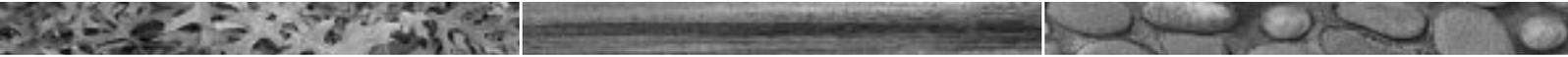
The second stage of our consultation process was to run a series of arts workshops with various sectors of the Doveton community. The workshops were used as a strategy to further engage the community in the project and to help build commitment to it. Workshops were held with a variety of clubs and organisations that were associated with Autumn Place. This workshop was held with students of Doveton Secondary College.

In contrast to the Port Phillip project, personal reflection and narratives were not the keynote of the consultations. Rather, broad, whole-of-community themes were addressed. The questions focused on the nature of public space and people's collective sense of place. In the workshop above, the students were encouraged to open their minds and think about how they felt about their community, where they live, what they value, and what is important to them.

In a number of the projects in the scheme, art was used as a way of engaging members of the community in thinking about their current environment, imagining an alternative that encouraged social connectedness, and planning something that might be possible. Art was important because it was seen as a more inclusive form of expression and communication. Throughout the scheme, projects used a variety of arts-based approaches to engage the community and explore issues of public space planning. This was done because language, particularly the language of policy or bureaucracies, can exclude some members of the community because of their educational background or culture.

One of the important themes of the workshops was the ways in which young people were connected to public space in their local area. This was seen as an important indication and metaphor of their sense of community more generally. The workshops revealed that the young people involved did not feel strongly connected to Autumn Place. It was seen as being somewhat uninviting and not a place where young people would choose to be.

Consulting young people, seeking their views and involving them in the process of redeveloping Autumn Place emphasises their value to the community. Young people often feel separated from the community, mistrusted and as having little power over the decisions that are made. This part of the project worked to value them and the contribution they could make to planning useable public spaces. This was designed to increase their sense of agency.

However, working with young people in this way meant their views had to inform the redesign of the space and the artwork that was going to be installed. Not everyone's views would necessarily be reflected in the finished work. This was handled by making the process as transparent as possible, and keeping people informed about the decisions that were being made and project's progress. The questions asked of the young people were also somewhat general. There was a sense of them 'becoming town planners' and, as such, they had to be aware of the various considerations and viewpoints that have an impact on any final decision.

The result was to create a space that was enticing to the whole community, including young people.

The City of Yarra

The project in the City of Yarra was one component of a much larger arts initiative centred on the Collingwood housing estate. This initiative was a partnership between local government, the Ministry of Housing, tenants, local artists, a range of community and welfare organisations and RMIT University. The project's focus was on the development of the Collingwood Housing Estate Arts Precinct (CHEAP). The precinct centred on a disused underground carpark on the estate. This arts space was the work of the project.

The following photographs are not chronological.

The Collingwood Housing Estate Arts Committee (CHEAC) was initiated as an ongoing governance structure to develop and manage the precinct.

Members included tenants, agencies, Office of Housing staff, council workers and artists. The committee meets approximately every six weeks.

CHEAC was responsible for the implementation of *Shelf life* (in June 2002) along with artist Alex Jack and tenants of the estate. *Shelf life* was the inaugural project in the space and was designed as a 'spatial inquiry' into the future use of the disused carpark. This project featured stencil works and diagrams throughout the space. These explored the history, current state and potential of the space. Tenants built display shelves as a part of the project presentation. These were later installed in their flats.

Sustainability was an important feature of this project. The redevelopment of the carpark into an arts space was a commitment to longevity. The governance structure consolidated the work. The initial flyer below for CHEAP emphasised engagement and training. The idea was to use the project as a pathway into employment and provide skilled workers for the site.

THOUSANDS OF FIRE HOSES

307 FIRE HYDRANTS
17 RED FIRE HOSE CABINETS
27 RED FIRE HOSE REELS

Collingwood Housing Estate Arts Precinct Project

if you are 16 - 25 creative and interested in learning new arts leadership skills for free · contact Leann Downey on 94175144 for the CHEAP Project

on the grounds of the Collingwood Public Housing Estate

A Community Jobs Program worker grinds a section of another artwork: *Light-well installations*. The design team, in conjunction with the Cultivating Communities Group who run the community gardens directly above the carpark, designed the three installations. These consisted of painted alcoves that receive natural light. Railway sleepers and drains were installed, followed by planter beds and ferns. Small sculptural works were then added.

In the photograph above, Colin Tatlow and Community Jobs Program workers install the sleepers into the light-wells. The circle of CDs behind were blown by air currents, reflecting colour throughout the space.

The design team and tenants enrolled in the Community Jobs Program installed gallery lights in the space, painted out selected areas (being careful not to eradicate some of the prized graffiti) and installed temporary artworks. The space is vast and can be used in multiple ways.

The project worked on the assumption that there was a range of talents and community assets within the local area. For example, it worked with BEEM, which comprised a number of Indigenous artists. This photograph was taken on the Collingwood estate after the auction of the most recent BEEM initiative that centred on Reconciliation Day in Collingwood. The painting was started at the Collingwood Harvest Festival in April 2003 on a board donated by local real estate agents and using paint provided by local suppliers. In May 2003, the BEEM group hosted Reconciliation Day celebrations on the estate and invited tenants and agencies in the area. The Tenants Association and Jesuit Social Services prepared food and hot chocolate, and local timber merchants supplied wood for the brazier. The group held an auction of the painting and sold it for $900, which was then donated to the recently established youth program on the estate.

The project always maintained an internal and external focus. The housing estate is a complex and large community and the project could have concentrated solely on the tenants' interests and needs. However, this was not the approach taken. The project was always located within the wider geographical and artistic communities. There have been efforts to promote the space as an important new arts venue in Melbourne. This has had the effect of ensuring the diversity of the artwork shown. It also meant that outsiders came into the estate. Although the project focused on engaging tenants in the work, the estate was never seen as an island.

New perspective on underground art

GALLERYNEWS BY CLAY LUCAS

IN THE late 1980s, huge padlocks were placed on the underground car park at the Collingwood Housing Estate in Hoddle Street. Crime problems in the sprawling, concrete space were out of control, and estate managers decided it was a headache they could do without. For many years it stayed locked, leaves and dust gathering in the stairwells, padlocks rusting.

Two years ago, the social welfare group Outreach floated the idea of a huge concrete box for art, produced by estate residents. At last month's Harvest Festival, the car park hosted an eclectic arts exhibition, showcasing the work of tenants, Collingwood College, The Collingwood Neighbourhood House and installations by sculpture group Down Street Studios. The day was such a success that there are plans to use the space more regularly for arts projects involving estate residents.

Indigenous arts group BEEM, which has done several murals around Collingwood and Fitzroy, will soon start a mural on the ramp leading down to the car park.

Down Street Studio's Cameron Robbins, who worked on installations at the Harvest Festival, said the vast area was ideal for artists to work in.

"The more use it gets, and the more projects happen down there, the better the vibe gets. But when it's locked up, it fills with leaves and detritus and it isn't a great place to be," Robbins says.

"This was once a real no-go area," says Kate McCaughey, Yarra Council's co-ordinator of arts and cultural services. Ms McCaughey's department has been working on plans with the estate's management committee and the Office of Housing.

In the past, the Fringe Festival has used the car park to make floats in, and some dance companies have used it for filming, but now the estate residents want to turn it into a place where they can create.

This description of the project appeared in Divercity – The official newsletter of the City of Port Phillip halfway through the project

Conclusion

Conclusion

The Arts and Environment Scheme was a successful strategy to implement VicHealth's Mental Health Promotion Plan. The scheme fulfilled the intentions of the MHPP in that it made a significant contribution to social connectedness within the communities. This is the nature of the arts because they can symbolise and express diverse experiences within a single form and create a sense of identity for whole communities. However, social connectedness was also enhanced because of the processes used in the development of the works. Many non-specialist people were engaged in the conception, refinement and, in some cases, the manufacture of the works. In most sites, the scheme focused on marginalised and vulnerable groups within the community.

The scheme was designed to enhance public space through creative activity. In addition, VicHealth sought to influence local government in terms of public space planning and the positive impact this can have on the community's mental health.

Eight councils were funded during 2001–2003. These councils were diverse, and they ranged in size and location. There was a mixture of inner suburban, rural and outer suburban local government areas. They also had quite different traditions regarding public art and environmental planning.

The scheme resulted in the creation of very different works, all of which responded to and changed the environments in which they were placed. The number of works varied in each site. Some councils created a single major work; others were more modest in scale, but more numerous. The communities involved made choices of scale, number and materials at the local level.

The scheme also had an impact on the processes of local government. There was evidence that cultural development activities are now seen as having a health dimension. The projects also worked across a range of government functions including strategic, environmental and public health planning. Processes that were implemented as part of this scheme are now being applied more generally across the work of councils.

The final impact of the scheme was in terms of professional discourse. A series of seminars on issues related to the scheme was run at VicHealth. These disseminated the ideas of the scheme to a wider audience than the funded projects. They also provided some high-level input to the projects and the sector more generally.

Mental Health Promotion Framework 2005-2007

Key Social and Economic Determinants of Mental Health and Themes for Action

Social inclusion
- Supportive relationships
- Involvement in group activities
- Civic engagement

Freedom from discrimination and violence
- Valuing of diversity
- Physical security
- Self determination and control of one's life

Access to economic resources
- Work
- Education
- Housing
- Money

Population Groups and Action Areas

Population groups
- Children
- Young people
- Women and men
- Older people
- Indigenous communities
- Culturally diverse communities
- Rural communities

Health promotion action
- Research, monitoring and evaluation
- Direct participation programs
- Organisational development (including workforce development)
- Community strengthening
- Community marketing
- Advocacy
- Legislative and policy reform

Settings for Action

HOUSING	COMMUNITY SERVICES	EDUCATION	WORKPLACE	SPORT & REC	HEALTH	ACADEMIC
TRANSPORT	CORPORATE	PUBLIC	ARTS	LOCAL GOVT.	JUSTICE	

Intermediate Outcomes

Individual

Projects and programs which increase sustained:
- Involvement in group activities
- Access to supportive relationships
- Self esteem and self efficacy
- Access to education and employment
- Self determination and control
- Mental health literacy

Organisational

Organisations which are:
- Inclusive
- Responsive
- Safe, supportive and sustainable
- Working in partnerships across sectors
- Implementing evidence based approaches to their work

Community

Environments which are safe, supportive, sustainable and inclusive

Enhanced community cohesion

Enhanced Civic engagement

Increased awareness of mental health and wellbeing issues

Societal

Integrated, sustained and supportive policy and programs

Strong legislative platform...

Resource allocation

Governance structures

Long-term Benefits

Increased sense of belonging
Improved physical health
Less stress, anxiety and depression
Less substance misuse
Enhanced skill levels

Integrated intersectoral resources and activities

Community valuing of diversity and actively disowning discrimination
Less violence & crime
Improved productivity

Reduced social and health inequalities
Improved quality of life and life expectancy

Victoria
The Place To Be

VicHealth

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au