

# Promoting Diversity through the Arts

*Reducing race-based discrimination and supporting diversity*



**Artistic pursuits such as drama, film-making, digital arts, music and stand-up comedy provide a great way of supporting diversity and strengthening intercultural relations and understanding. They are also a good means of encouraging dialogue about the harmful impacts of race-based discrimination and the benefits of diversity.**

VicHealth has funded 16 projects to do just this, by engaging people in the process of 'making art' or by using various arts programs to communicate these messages to a wider audience.

The *Promoting Diversity through the Arts* program will run until 2012. It will employ a variety of promising approaches to address community attitudes and beliefs that may lead to unfair treatment of people on the basis of race, culture, ethnicity or religion, undermine acceptance of diversity or contribute to tensions and misunderstanding between groups.<sup>1</sup>

Photos left to right:

Sabrina Ater, Free World Project. Photo: Jorge de Araujo  
Free World Project. Photo: Kit Haselden

## The program

*Promoting Diversity through the Arts* is part of a broader program to support diversity and reduce race-based discrimination. This program is being developed by VicHealth and its partners in response to studies showing that people who are exposed to race-based discrimination have a higher chance of developing a range of health problems, especially anxiety and depression.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, people tend to have better health and wellbeing when their cultural background is respected and valued.<sup>3</sup>

## Benefits of diversity

Supporting diversity and reducing discrimination are also important for:

- Increasing productivity and innovation
- Reducing the economic costs associated with discrimination and resulting disadvantage
- Building social cohesion and social inclusion
- Protecting human rights
- Reducing the gap in health, social and economic status between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Victorians

Studies show that people from Indigenous, African, Middle-Eastern, Muslim and Asian backgrounds are most affected by discrimination and intolerance.<sup>4</sup> This is evident both in discrimination reported by these groups and in the attitudes toward them held by the wider community. Accordingly, the program will focus on changing attitudes, beliefs and behaviours towards these groups.

The projects are being targeted to areas that are culturally diverse. However, they also aim to reach audiences in outer-suburban and regional areas in which an increasing number of new arrivals from overseas are settling. Many of these areas also have well-established Indigenous communities. As well as traditional arts venues, the projects will use community venues such as sporting clubs, social clubs and schools. The intention is to bring arts to people who may otherwise have limited opportunities for participation.

For more information about VicHealth's work to support diversity and reduce race-based discrimination, go to: [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/preventingdiscrimination](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/preventingdiscrimination)

## Promoting diversity through the arts

For many years, VicHealth has developed strong partnerships with arts organisations to increase participation in arts activities, break down social isolation and build social connectedness. This has included supporting Indigenous and migrant and refugee communities to strengthen and present their arts and culture. These programs continue, but Promoting Diversity through the Arts is a new approach. It will support arts organisations to communicate *about* diversity, discrimination and intercultural relations to a wide audience. Taking a constructive approach, the projects will provide opportunities for audiences to reflect on:

- Misunderstandings we might hold about certain groups
- The experiences of people from migrant, refugee and Indigenous backgrounds
- The common humanity we all share, as well as the differences between us
- Whether values such as fairness and respect for others are reflected in our interactions with people from cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds that differ from our own
- Discrimination and intolerance and their impacts

Many of the projects also involve bringing people from different cultural backgrounds together as participants in the process of 'making art'. Collaborative activities, such as developing theatre performances, making arts installations and films, producing news stories or performing comedy or music and dance routines, have the potential to help break down the barriers between groups that can lead to tension, intolerance and discrimination. Studies show that these new understandings and behaviours are taken by participants into other areas of their lives.

Together, the projects will form a rolling three-year program that will be supported by promotional activity to be led by VicHealth.

An evaluation is being conducted to assess the feasibility of the approach and to help build knowledge about effective ways of supporting diversity and reducing discrimination through arts settings.

### About the projects

#### Centre for Multicultural Youth – Stand up 4 Rights

This comedy project is for a wide range of young people, including those from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds, who live in Melton, Wyndham and Casey. With support from professional comedians and advocates from Youth Law, participants will develop, write, rehearse and present stand-up comedy performances on the topic of discrimination and human rights to more than 2000 students at 20 high schools.

#### City of Greater Dandenong – Face to Face

Disparate cultural groups in Springvale will come together to expose, and move towards resolving, issues of discrimination and intolerance. The project will provide participants with the skills to tell, collect and document their own and other people's stories. It will foster community cohesion and build trust, pride, respect and understanding between participants and the wider community. By dispelling prevailing myths around community safety, Face to Face will also encourage people from other parts of Melbourne to visit Springvale.

#### ArtsHouse (City of Melbourne) – The Black Arm Band Community Engagement Program

The Black Arm Band presents music of the Australian Aboriginal experience. This music has the power to creatively give voice to and engage with community concerns, it is a force for social awareness and change. Members of the Band will present workshops in Indigenous communities to build community capacity and self-esteem. They will identify and mentor emerging Indigenous talent and support their participation in future projects of The Black Arm Band.



Photos top to bottom:

A.R.A.B Project. Photo: Ewan Macleod

Paul Kelly & Dewayne Everettsmith, *dirtsong*, The Black Arm Band. Photo: John Sones

Emma Donovan & Shane Howard, *Hidden Republic*, The Black Arm Band. Photo: John Sones

The project will also promote and provide access to people from Indigenous communities to The Black Arm Band's main-stage events.

### Cultural Infusion – InterACT

An ensemble of professional artists from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will work with community groups in outer metropolitan, regional and rural localities that experience inter-cultural conflict, to develop and implement a series of high-quality mainstream arts presentations. The project, conducted in partnership with local governments in Wellington, Casey, Hume, Brimbank and East Gippsland, will provide opportunities to promote dialogue and cultural diversity at high-profile mainstream events such as the Voyages Australia Day Concerts at Federation Square and via a schools touring program.

### Footscray Community Arts Centre – Amer and Nazeem's Variety Hour

Young comedians Amer Rahman and Nazeem Hussain will develop a new parody on the variety or talk-show format to literally promote cultural and artistic 'variety'. It will capitalise on existing networks and create new links with communities in Melbourne's inner and outer west. Guest appearances by professional artists and partnerships with the Western Bulldogs and the Victorian Arts Centre will ensure broad appeal. The show will premiere at the new performing space at Footscray Community Arts Centre before touring outer metropolitan Melbourne and Victoria.

### The Jewish Museum of Australia – Exploring the Tower of Babel

Professional artists and community arts groups from different backgrounds and faiths will work together to create and present a multimedia, multicultural and multi-art form exhibition, which will tour to venues across Melbourne and in regional

Victoria. The Tower, the biblical story of the creation of diverse languages, will be used as a catalyst for discussions about multiculturalism, inclusion and diversity.

### La Mama – Theatre for our Diverse Community

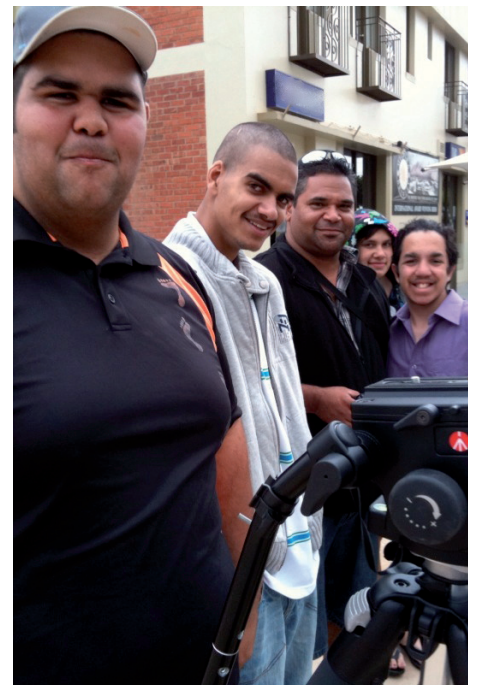
A series of four plays exploring the issues of discrimination and diversity by Hoa Pham, Simon Tengende, Mari Lourey and Helen Lucas will be produced at La Mama. Performance seasons in Carlton will be followed by performances in outer-suburban Melbourne and regional Victoria. Partnerships with schools, community groups and business will endeavour to attract new audiences. During facilitated forums the creative teams will discuss the work, and underlying issues, with audiences and opinion formers.

### Museums Victoria – Talking Difference

Talking Difference is a multi-platform, multi-layered and new media presentation of digital stories. It will build connections and relationships with artists and communities who reflect Victoria's diversity to create digital stories for presentation on-site and online. It will establish a forum for dialogue and exchange about diversity and related issues to: build awareness, empathy and foster better understanding of difference; enable intercultural and inter-generational dialogue and exchange; and demonstrate leadership in cultural programming and social and community networking.

### National Gallery Victoria – We R1

The Gallery's extensive collection of Australian and international art will provide a focus for young people in six outer-suburban, rural and regional communities who will participate in art-related activities such as artist talks, youth-to-youth gallery tours, workshops, performances and installations, to enhance intercultural relations between young Australians from anglo, Indigenous migrant and refugee backgrounds.



Photos top to bottom:  
 A.R.A.B Project. Photo: Jeremy Angerson  
 Calling the Shots Project. Photo: Simon Green  
 A.R.A.B Project. Photo: Ewan Macleod

## **New Australia Media – NAM-Oz**

This project gives a voice to those who are missing – and sometimes misrepresented – in the mainstream media. In what is thought to be a first for both journalism and multiculturalism in Australia, NAM-Oz will link young people from Indigenous, refugee and migrant backgrounds with journalist mentors – engaging both in the art of storytelling from a multicultural point of view. The stories that result from this collaboration will be published in an online newswire service dedicated to countering attitudes of intolerance and discrimination.

## **North Richmond Community Health Centre – NationHood**

NationHood builds on a program of creative exploration that has engaged young people from established and emerging migrant communities and to a large extent has focused on their direct experiences of racial intolerance. NationHood will deliver a large-scale contemporary art installation, an ensemble performance and a CD of original material. These components will be presented in schools, juvenile justice centres, regional and metropolitan festivals and other community events.

## **Phunktional – Calling the Shots**

This three-year arts program led by artists from Phunktional, Inc. will provide opportunities for intercultural contact for young people in Mildura and surrounding areas, culminating in public performances and the creation of a DVD. The promotion of dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people responds to a need identified by the project's reference group comprising members from local Indigenous and mainstream schools, health, police and youth services.

## **Regional Arts Victoria – The Diversity Commissions**

Performance artists Damian Callinan and Moira Finucane have each been commissioned to create a theatrical work specifically designed to reach audiences in community venues in outer-suburban and rural communities which may have limited opportunity to explore issues associated with cultural diversity, intercultural relations and discrimination. Premiere seasons will be presented in metropolitan venues. Subsequent tours to small venues in outer metropolitan and regional Victoria are planned.

## **The Torch Project – Re-Igniting Community**

This project consolidates the final stage of the Torch's Re-Igniting Community Victoria Project, which has been initiated by communities in 13 locations throughout Victoria. Exploring dialogue amongst Victoria's oldest and newest inhabitants, this initiative will prioritise the engagement of newly arrived and refugee communities, representing an exciting extension of the success that The Torch Project has had working with Indigenous communities.

## **Trent McCarthy and Associates – The Fair Go Comedy Tour**

A group of professional and emerging comedians – many from refugee, migrant and Indigenous backgrounds – will develop stand-up comedy, theatre and music shows exploring issues relating to cultural diversity, discrimination and the 'fair go'. More than 50 performances will be given in 20 sports and social clubs, churches, community halls and council venues in

outer-suburban and regional locations. Workshops in stand-up comedy will be offered to local school and community groups during the Tour.

## **Victorian Arabic Social Services – Anti-Racism Action Band (A.R.A.B) Sound and Music Hub**

Up to 60 music-hungry youth from culturally diverse backgrounds around the northern suburbs of Melbourne will work with composer/sound artist Kelly Ryall, composer/musical director Irine Vela and musician/producer Tim Rogers to create unique new blends and incarnations of traditional, classical, street beat, electronica, hard core rock and body rhythm that will form the musical scores and sound landscapes for A.R.A.B's Program Platforms: Main Artistic Events, Tawasul gigging circuit, Special Projects and new work.

1 These will be based on extensive research undertaken by VicHealth and its partners and documented in *Building on our strengths: a framework to reduce race-based discrimination and promote diversity in Victoria*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, full report and summary reports available at: [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/preventingdiscrimination](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/preventingdiscrimination)

2 VicHealth 2007, *More than tolerance: embracing diversity for health*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne. Available at: [www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/preventingdiscrimination](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/preventingdiscrimination)

3 Ibid.

4 *Building on our strengths* (full report) – see footnote 1.