Gender Equality Through the Arts
Executive summary and Case Studies

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1 Executive summary

VicHealth aimed to use the power of art to raise awareness and promote gender equality and to celebrate women. It also wanted to build capacity by bringing artists and local councils together.

The program has demonstrated the effectiveness of a partnership model for promoting gender equality through the arts which allows for localised implementation. Collectively, the projects funded by the Gender Equality Through the Arts (GEARTS) grants program have successfully promoted gender equality by:

- **raising awareness and discussion of gender inequality;**
- **providing new perspectives on gender roles;**
- **highlighting the strength, capability and contribution of women; and**
- **providing opportunities and role models for young women and women of marginalized groups.**

1.1 Background and Aims

VicHealth is mandated to promote good health and the prevention of disease. Given the burden of disease associated with violence against women, VicHealth has an ongoing commitment to the prevention of gendered violence. Its primary prevention strategies focus on gender equality and community attitudes towards women and violence and have targeted various settings such as sports, education and the workplace.

The Gender Equality through the Arts (GEARTS) Grants Program progresses this work to the arts setting. Art as a mechanism of raising awareness and working towards social change has a long history.

VicHealth aimed to use the power of art to raise awareness and promote gender equality and to celebrate women. It also wanted to build capacity by bringing artists and local councils together. VicHealth invited Victorian Councils to partner with artists and creative industries organisations to apply for funding to support the creation of ART initiatives that promote gender equality. This work is timely, given the recently enacted Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic), in which local government has been recognised as a key setting with a duty to promote gender equality due to the significant and direct influence of Council policies, programs, and services on the community.

The goals of the VicHealth GEARTS Program were to support Councils and their partners and communities with the development of creative arts initiatives that:

- Raise awareness, engage with and progress contemporary ideas about gender equality and the gendered drivers of violence against women,

- Celebrate and promote Victorian women and girls as independent leaders, and as equal, capable, and valued members of the community,

- Improve the social connection, resilience and mental wellbeing of participants, and their sense of safety in their communities,

- Increase the capacity of Local Government to build partnerships with arts and corporate organisations to act on gender equality using the arts, and

- Build the evidence base on what works in the arts to promote gender equality for mental wellbeing.

1.2 The projects

Seven local Council projects were funded under the grants scheme. Projects commenced in mid 2019 for a 12-month period, which was extended by six months in response to limitations associated with Covid 19 social distancing and lockdown requirements. Grant recipients were required to develop initiatives that would incorporate at least one of the following strategies to address the gendered drivers of violence against women:

- Challenging gender stereotypes and roles;

- Strengthening positive, equal and respectful relationships;

- Promoting women's independence and decision making; and

- Challenging the condoning of violence against women.

The seven projects included:

- **Female Futures**

- **Art for a Better Democracy**

- **Gender Equality Game Jam**

- **Reclaim the Lanes: Girls Own Space**

- **Framed by Gender**

- **Balit Bagurrk: Strong Aboriginal women of the Yarra Ranges**

- **The Empathy Project.**

2 GEARTS Projects

Grant recipients were required to develop initiatives that would incorporate at least one of the following strategies to address the gendered drivers of violence against women:

- Challenging gender stereotypes and roles;

- Strengthening positive, equal and respectful relationships;

- Promoting women's independence and decision making; and

- Challenging the condoning of violence against women.

The alignment of project aims to the targeted strategies is summarised in Table 2. No project aimed to directly challenge the condoning of violence against women.

To see a full list of each project's aims and which drivers of violence against women they tackled, see page 22 of the full report.

2.1 City of Melbourne – Female Futures

Images from film workshop

Project Description

The City of Melbourne, Female Futures project is a Signal project that empowers and upskills young women and non-binary people as arts leaders in their community. Gender equality messaging was delivered through the creation of short films and podcasts produced by program participants.

Signal is the City of Melbourne's creative studio for young people 13 to 25 years. The project worked with young women and non-binary people, who live in or 'hang out' in the City of Melbourne, and professional artists to creatively explore gender equality through the making of short films and sound works.

Summer Shorts are short films that young people made with filmmakers Kate Lefoe and Hannah Moore as part of Signal Summer, an eight-day intensive program attended by twenty participants.

Twenty-nine young people worked with Hannah Moore to make a collective film highlighting the creativity of female artists exhibited in Female Futures Creatives.

PROJECT AIMS

- To empower young women and female identifying people in creative and technical roles to explore what a world without gender inequality would look like.

- To identify and overcome barriers for participation for young women from CALD backgrounds.

- To facilitate the co-creation of artworks that foster young women's independence through art making.

A weeklong workshop called Technofeminist Futures imagined what a Gender Equal Future could sound like.

Female Futures also worked with African-Australian young women running podcasting and filmmaking workshops at the Drum in Carlton with artists Ayan Shira and Elizabeth Langslow. Young people's personal accounts about making the films are available. One hundred and five audience members joined the Workshop Drum podcast facilitated by Ayan Shira.

Images from film workshop

After the completion of the creative programs by the young participants, their works were showcased. The Female Futures website launched in 27th July 2020.

In June 2020, Signal was joined by Bittersweet to host three video conversations between women of colour around hair, colourism and creative women of colour involving twelve participants.

The Female Futures project culminated in an online Creative Futures Forum in June 2020. The forum aimed to give young women and non-binary creatives the opportunity to get tips and advice around breaking into the arts industry. The forum featured creative producers Areej Nur, Mel Pose, Naomi Velaphi and filmmaker Claudia Sangiorgi Dalimore and was facilitated by Female Futures' Associate Producer Samira Farah. The panel session of the Creatives Futures Forum can be viewed here.

The following quote from a Creative Futures Forum attendee illustrates the ways in which events such as the Creatives Forum can help overcome the negative effects of gender stereotyping and empower young women/non-binary people hoping to enter the creative industries.

"

Personally, I haven't had many opportunities to be exposed to different arts events, work collaboratively or meet people who are interested or are working within the industry. I've always been quite insecure and self-conscious about my creative abilities as most people in my family are quite conservative; having little passion or exposure to the arts and favouring boys over girls, so I haven't had much support from most of my family. But seeing other women talking about their work in the industry was certainly uplifting and liked to see the different kinds of people with similar interests to mine. I was always unsure of how I could approach other people who are in the industry or have similar goals, but this has given me a little more confidence in myself.

Although the Creatives Forum was transitioned to an on-line environment, with some difficulties associated with the limitations of on-line platforms, participants still experienced a sense of connection with fellow attendees.

"

The connection came from the fact that I shared similar values to most of the attendees and we were equally as involved in activities. The main struggle was the [zoom] setting.

Project Reach and Ongoing Gender Equality Promotion

The project reported 1058 live audience numbers, 5376 views on Facebook and 2633 website visits as of 30th September 2020 (further details in Appendix G of full report). All online webinars were streamed to multiple platforms such as Facebook Live and YouTube Live. The Female Futures website continues to feature all the films created as well as artist bios and links to the panel discussions.

Some participants of the Female Futures project have continued to contribute to work through SIGNAL arts in programming and curation, indicating that the partnership provided a welcoming opportunity for participants to enact and to continue developing their learnings.

The Female Futures project reaffirmed the importance and significance of council initiatives for the community, with the project officer noting the significant distance that some of the participants travelled in order to attend. From the Council perspective, this project bolstered commitments to gender equality work for young women and transgender and non-binary youth.

The Female Futures project also strengthened capacity for future projects in this realm, through development of knowledge, skills, and gendered language awareness. Female Futures was also considered in relation to the translation potential and purpose that it could serve throughout the Council across departments, continuing the promotion of the gender equality messages and the reach of the project.

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- *I look forward to sharing the Female Futures website and films with different Council areas including Arts, Libraries, Youth Services, Family Services, Community Services, Melbourne Knowledge Week, Social Investment, City Safety and many more. (Female Futures Program Manager reflection).*

To see a full discussion of the project findings go to page 26 of the full report.

2.2 Bayside City – Art for a Better Democracy

Portrait of Donna Moore

Exhibition within the Council Chambers

Project Description

The Bayside City Council engaged 171 local women nominated by the community in recognition of their contribution and leadership, in many areas including sport, the arts, politics, business, social justice, volunteerism, and the media.

Working with renowned artist Ponch Hawkes, the participants were asked to wear fake moustaches and beards in their photographic portraits to humorously disrupt the Council's gender narrative. Ponch's vision was to highlight and question the stereotype of men being more capable leaders in politics and at work.

In Bayside City Council's 161-year history, only 15 female mayors have been elected to Council. The project aimed to highlight the historic under-representation of females on Council, both in the past and present. This simple yet powerful statement sought to challenge notions around leadership and raise questions about gender inequality in all facets of society.

Although the project celebrates the contribution of participants, the project also sought to encourage women to become involved in local democracy and raise awareness about gender inequality within the Bayside municipality.

PROJECT AIMS

- To increase awareness of the gender inequality in Bayside's past and current democratic representation.

- To encourage community participation in disrupting and challenging the gender narrative in Bayside's democratic representation.

- To increase female participation in local democracy.

Each photograph was framed and displayed on the walls of the Council Chambers, replacing all previous male mayors' portraits.

A photography exhibition (online due to COVID-19) showcased the 171 photographed women.

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Close up of individual portraits installed within the Council Chambers

A live (online) talk with artist Ponch Hawkes discussed the meaning behind the photographs and the purpose of the photography exhibition in challenging gender inequality.

A Changing Faces website featuring photographs of all 171 women and videos ensured participants of the project and the public could view the exhibition.

Social media promoted the project and awareness raising about Bayside's past and current democratic representation.

Online celebration, networking and concluding event for participants was organised with Katherine Fox key note speaker and five participants shared their leadership journeys.

A hard copy and digital exhibition catalogue was made available here.

Project Reach and Ongoing Gender Equality Promotion

Articles promoting Changing Faces appeared in the local Let's Talk Bayside magazine June/July 2019 and February/March 2020 editions. Changing Faces was featured in The Herald Sun on the 20 December 2019 with caption 'Hair hair, Mrs Mayor'. A series of social media posts were featured in Bayside City Council Facebook pages. This included the Facebook event with Ponch Hawkes in May 2020 which was streamed live. The Online launch exhibition video with Ponch Hawkes and Mayor had 440 views. The Bayside Council website was used to promote Changing Faces with over 3,500 views as at September 2020, with the exhibition being an ongoing feature of the website for continuing reach and project promotion.
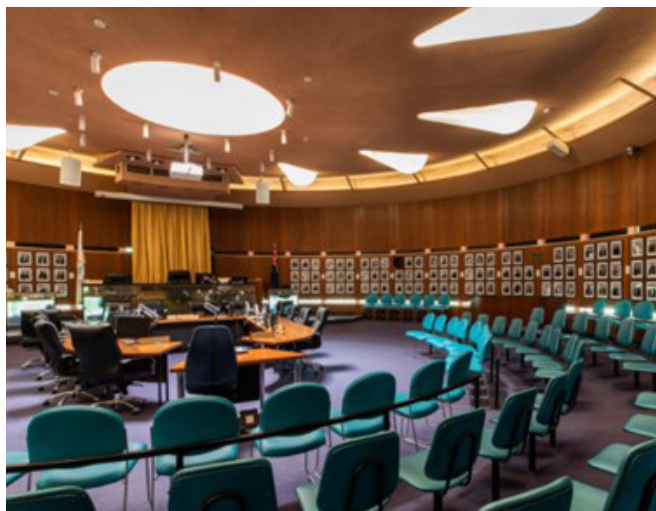
Bayside City Council Chambers

The Art for a Better Democracy project aimed not only to draw attention to gender disparities in historical council representation, but also to encourage women who were leaders in the community to take action to increase female representation in the present. This ongoing promotion of the gender equality message is seen in the total of 35 participants who attended the online celebration, networking and concluding event, and the 8 women who participated in the online workshop with the Victorian Local Government Association to support women in running for Council elections. Further details are available in Appendix H, in the full report.

Bayside City also provided the following commentary for project reach:

- Photographing 171 local women nominated as leaders of Bayside and asking them to wear a fake moustache in the photograph as a way to humorously disrupt Bayside City Council's gender narrative. Each photograph was framed and displayed on the walls of the Council Chambers, replacing all previous male mayors' portraits.

- Hosting a photography exhibition to showcase the 171 women who had their photographs taken by artist Ponch Hawkes. Due to COVID-19 the photography exhibition was moved online. Website pages were developed to include photographs of all 171 women and a video was developed to ensure participants of the project and the general public could still view the exhibition.

- Live (online) artist talk with Ponch Hawkes to discuss the meaning behind the photographs and the purpose of the photography exhibition in challenging gender equality.

- Hard copy and digital exhibition catalogue created and disseminated.

- Social media promotion of the project and awareness raising about Bayside's past and current democratic representation.

- Delivery of an online workshop with Women's Health in the South East and Victorian Local Governance Association to support women in running for Council in the October 2020 elections.

- Delivery of an online celebration, networking and concluding event for participants. Katherine Fox key note speaker and 5 participants shared their leadership journeys.

Feedback from participants also indicates that there was ongoing promotion of the gender equality message in their communities, particularly in conversations with friends, family, and colleagues about their participation and as response to the easily shared catalogue that they'd received in the mail.

Art for a Better Democracy evidently contributed to a feeling of connection amongst the participants, facilitating the emergence of a community of women leaders who were enthusiastic about using their new connections to support each other and amplify women's contributions in the community through a mentoring and leadership group.

The project officer for Art for a Better Democracy also spoke about the interest that the project had received from other Councils, speaking to the potential to take the project on a "roadshow" to continue to promote the project's messages. The Council, alongside external organisations and community leaders, are motivated to continue to develop initiatives to promote gender equality in the Bayside community.

> "
> - *[A key highlight of the project was…:] Many women wanting to continue the project in terms of mentoring and creating a community of women leaders in Bayside. This was unexpected but a really important and potentially long-lasting legacy of the project. (Project officer reflection, Art for a Better Democracy)*

To see a full discussion of the project findings go to page 31 of the full report.

2.3 City of Port Phillip – Gender Equality Game Jam

Images from GE Game Jam

Project Description

The City of Port Phillip, in a world-first Gender Equality Game Jam (GE Game Jam) project, challenged Victorian game developers (game jammers) to create games with the theme gender equality and showcase to the public.

The games industry is over-represented by men, with recent information showing only 21% of employees in the industry are women, 48% of companies have only one gender making up their team, and only 13% of game developers are women (Australian Parliament, 2016; Game Developers Association Australia, 2018). This is despite 51% of game players being female. The impact of this gender inequality goes beyond those employed in the games industry and extends to consumers of games.

Three organisations partnered with the City of Port Phillip to address this gender inequality through a 2-day Gender Equality (GE) Game Jam – incidentally thought to be the first of its kind in the world.

Girl Geek Academy (GGA) is a Melbourne-based organisation with a mission to encourage a global movement towards gender equality in all areas of technology (including gaming). GGA led the GE Game Jam using their skills and experience supporting gender equal action in gaming and technology.

PROJECT AIMS

- To educate games arts practitioners on gender equality domains.
- To challenge gender stereotypes and roles within games industry and to consider how games can be used to inform broader community.
- To generate understanding and empathy broadly through public display and free, online access to the games.

The Arcade provided the venue for the GE Game Jam, in line with their collaborative and inclusive approach to co-working for game developers and creative companies. Star Health, a leading provider of Primary Health Services, provided support to participants and project partners in the forms of resources, information, and training in equal and respectful relationships and primary prevention.

Through this collaboration, 36 Game Jammers attended a gender equality workshop and formed teams to create free, online accessible GE Game Jam games.

Completed GE game submission from Game Jam

Image from GE Game Jam Play Party event

Completed GE game submission from Game Jam

Image from GE Game Jam Play Party event

At the <u>Game Jam</u> in September 2019, mixed gender teams created a gender equality inspired game from beginning to end in a prescribed time of 48 hours. Participants became immersed in gender equality issues both directly and indirectly as they worked in their own diverse teams and created a game that tackles these problems. Many of these games challenged common gendered stereotypes and biases, as seen in the workplace, in video game character creation, and in choices of baby's toys.

Others encouraged reflection and conversation around the role of gender inequality in everyday social interactions. For example, one game, set on a train, focussed on passengers' experiences of micro-aggressions (the subtle everyday slights and indignities experienced by marginalised people, especially women). It aimed to highlight the prevalence, pervasiveness, and subtlety of gender inequality in a public place and to raise awareness and encourage bystander intervention in the face of predatory behaviour on public transport.

A public <u>Play Party event</u> occurred in September 2019, exhibiting games developed during the GE Game Jam involving participants, mentors, and speakers.

Physical displays and game demonstrations were also held at PAX (Penny Arcade Expo) Aus 2019 in Melbourne, the largest gaming forum in the Southern Hemisphere with more than 80,000 attendees at the 2019 event.

Free, online access to GE Game Jam games and resources are <u>available here</u>.

Images from GE Game Jam Play Party event

Project Reach and Ongoing Gender Equality Promotion

The project reported 27 participants attended the gender equality workshop. Thirty-six GE Game Jam participants, 10 presenters and 54 public members attended the Play Party event. The games produced during the game jam were made available online, along with other resources. They were accessed 117 times at the time of reporting. Social media included Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn posts. Further details are available in Appendix I, in the full report.

The GE Game Jam resulted in a number of games that challenged gender stereotypes and encouraged conversations about gender equality, which continue to be available online. Many of these games were also displayed at PAX Aus 2019 to increase project reach. The opportunities and connections made by participants through the GE Game Jam and through exhibiting their work at PAX Aus 2019 acted to motivate participants to continue to promote gender equality. This occurred in multiple ways: participants were encouraged to break the mould of standard games by making games that follow their passions and interests, such as those with messages for social change and gender equality.

Participants were also encouraged to continue to develop their skills and confidence in the highly male-dominated games development industry, due to the creation and strengthening of a gender-sensitive and supportive community. Nine months on, participants of the GE Game Jam indicated that their engagement with issues of gender equality had developed further; for example, one participant recounted their experience of starting a group to encourage and support diversity in their workplace.

The GE Game Jam project officer also indicated that this initiative has contributed to a greater understanding within the Council of the capacity and potential of the arts in work for social change and gender equality, opening more possibilities for future projects.

> "
> *Council is thinking of doing some more work with Girl Geek Academy after this project... I think it raised the awareness of how arts can be used in a different capacity.*
> *(Project officer, GE Game Jam)*

Image from GE Game Jam Play Party event

To see a full discussion of the project findings go to page 38 of the full report.

2.4 South Gippsland Shire – Girls Own Space

Before and after images of Foster project

Project Description

The South Gippsland Shire Council, in response to the community concern about violence against women, developed the "Girls Own Space" project, to encourage women and girls to feel more secure in public spaces.

Girls Own Space involved the claiming of a space in the towns of Korumburra, Leongatha, Foster and Mirboo North, to become safe and inclusive, through the vehicle of art.

In each town, a women's peer network of young and older women of all abilities was established to work with Council staff, professional artists, artist mentors and local community members to activate a public place where they would like to feel more safe, secure, and welcome.

The project ran 44 workshops in total with six Foster, four Mirboo North, 18 Leongatha and 16 Korumburra participants.

PROJECT AIMS

- To provide the opportunity, space, & platform for young regional women to physically mark their presence in their local environment – increased visibility of women and of gender equality issues broadly.

- To expose young regional women and our broader community to a high-quality arts experience with professional artists/mentors whilst building the capacity of our local artists to deliver in this space.

Foster project created a welcoming recreational space by painting a native plant mural on a shed. It collaborated with the Foster Secondary College Arts Department which incorporated a week of Girls Own Space activities into their curriculum to complete the project. Six participants attended workshops in Foster.
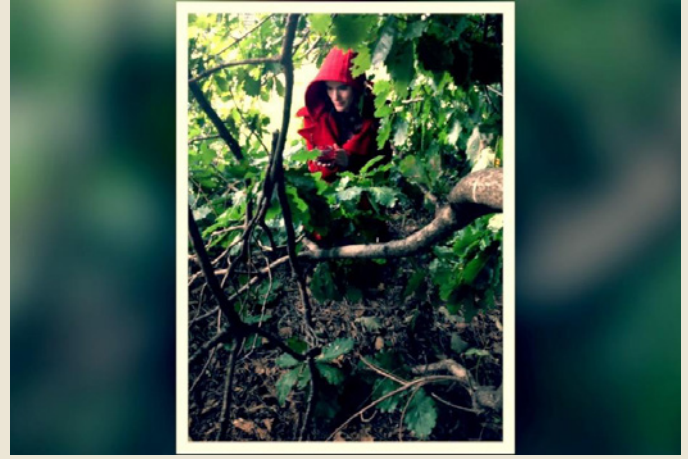
Mirboo North communal seating project

Image of Little Red Riding Hood in Leongatha Park

After image of Mirboo North courtyard

Image of Korumburra railway passage project

Mirboo North project claimed a courtyard space by creatively designing communal seating made from cypress wood. This project ran a structured and professional design development process throughout their workshops. Six participating members (including the artists) 'owned' all aspects and stages of the project. The resulting community seating utilises beautiful slabs of overlapping reclaimed timber on concrete plinths in an innovative and inclusive design.

The seating was further enhanced with synthetic grass, two olive trees and a planter filled with lavender. Four participants attended workshops in Mirboo North.

Leongatha project promoted young women in the context of the Little Red Riding Hood story in the horticultural park. Although workshops took place, the short film produced was deemed unacceptable for viewing by the Director of Yooralla and Specialist school and required more input/collaboration from the organisations.

Samples of footage were acceptable to be included in the documentary. The documentary showcased all four projects from start to completion.

Eighteen participants attended workshops in Leongatha. All workshops took place in a school room, with support workers present, aside from two film sessions which took place on site. The logistics of this project had to be tailored to the specific needs of the cohort, all of whom had varied needs.

Korumburra project transformed a dark and dingy railway passage to a vibrant space using murals. This project was supported by the Business Association as well as the Community House, with representatives from both, appearing regularly at workshops. Sixteen participants attended workshops in Korumburra.

Documentary showcasing the project is available. Girls own space commenced in late June 2020 and after a significant interruption due to COVID-19 restrictions throughout March – November 2020, was completed in December 2020.

Images of The Girls Own Space Team in Mirboo North

Project Reach and Ongoing Gender Equality Promotion

Social media included Facebook posts and eight newspaper articles. In total, sixteen project partners were recruited and described as critical to the successful delivery of each project, to different degrees across the four teams. Further details are available in Appendix J, in the underline full report.

Project partners included:

Foster   Foster Secondary College; Foster Netball Club; Foster Football Club; Foster Recreation Reserve Committee; Foster Community House; Stockyard Gallery (Foster)

Mirboo North   Mirboo North Community Foundation; Mirboo North Secondary College; Mirboo North Arts

Leongatha   Leongatha Specialist School; Leongatha Yooralla; Leongatha FReeZA group;

Korumburra   Korumburra Secondary College; Korumburra Community House; Korumburra Men's Shed; Korumburra Business Association

An interesting aspect of the reach of the Girls Own Space was its ability to attract project partners. It is possible this may be related to a greater sense of community and more awareness by community members regarding what is occurring in their towns in regional areas. The project officers summarised the diversity of community partners.

> "
> - *The partner relationship was particularly strong with the Mirboo North Community Foundation (MNCF) who offered the use of the Foundation's courtyard as a 'canvas' for design – with very few caveats and design controls or edits from the board. The reach that this physical space affords the project is extensive, as it is very public and central to the town. The MNCF have great connection across the community, and the ongoing potential for this project to communicate the broader goals of the project is very real.*
>
> - *Foster community partners, the Recreation Reserve Committee, volunteered support by handing over of an entire shed, again with no caveats or controls over the design content of the proposed mural. An interesting factor in this project is that this town has an unusual number of students identifying as same sex attracted and gender non-specific. Foster has, as a community, been forced into discussion (not always acceptance) around non-traditional gender roles. Discussions with partner representatives almost always involved the retelling of these stories and how people were viewing the uneasy shift into 'modern times'.*

The visibility and lasting nature of many of these projects has a direct impact on the durability of their messages and community impact. This contributed to ripples of conversation in the broader community and a strong sense of pride from participants.

> "
> - *The [Mirboo North] project team relayed a number of conversations they had with the general public around women, tools and construction, and the unusual sight this workshop was.*
>
> - *Many of the participants spoke of the pride they have in knowing that their community will be viewing this work on a daily basis. Within this sense of pride of the work made is a joy and awe that major pieces of public infrastructure have been handed over to young women. (Project Facilitator, Girls Own Space)*

The Girls Own Space project has also contributed to changes in the ways that South Gippsland Shire Council engage with projects of inclusion, connection, social change, and gender equality. The Council recently committed $252,000 of the $2,000,000 Covid recovery fund to 10 community art projects, many of which are targeted towards inclusion and connection. The Council is also making a more public and formal commitment to campaigns for gender equality, such as the 16 Days of Activism campaign.

To see a full discussion of the project findings go to page 44 of the full report.

2.5 Knox City – Framed By Gender

1Images from Hotham Street Ladies Shop of Opportunities

Project Description

The Knox City Council developed in partnership with community organisations and local groups, Framed by Gender, featuring two community art projects addressing gender inequality.

Over the month of November 2019, Boronia Library was activated by artist Anna Farago and Boronia Mall by The Hotham Street Ladies. Guided by local social change agencies, these artists invited audiences to explore gender stereotypes and roles, gendered spaces, and concepts of privilege and respect. The program also included a variety of innovative workshops that used art as a medium to engage in conversations about gender equality.

The Shop of Opportunity was a large-scale art installation that explored themes of gender inequality, with a series of accompanying community workshops, by The Hotham Street Ladies. The installation was based at the vacant shopfront on the first floor of Boronia Mall. Four of the external store windows housed works based around a key statistic or set of statistics related to gender inequality.

PROJECT AIMS

- To disrupt, explore and positively reframe notions of gender equality.
- To explore gender stereotypes and roles, the strengthening of positive, equal, and respectful relationships.
- To promote women's independence and decision making.

Each artwork was created from a mix of fabricated pieces (made of icing and fondant) and objects sourced from the op shops in Knox. The installation also incorporated a series of painted signs in the style of the mall's original promotional signwriting, as well as other elements including posters and billboards. The installation was a part of and the base of community activations within Boronia Mall.

Karaoke Event - I am Woman Hear Me Mall

Images of Words for Change

Hotham Street Ladies designed and conducted workshops and activities to appeal to diverse ages and cultures. These included

1   Opening – Facilitated karaoke: Songs about women and gender, amplifying women's voices (80 audience members)

2   Feminism for Kids: Families discuss gender issues via food

3   Scavenger Hunt: HSL will create a map exploring gender themes in public spaces

4   Femme Frost Off – 'Frosting' event, street art style, and identifying/transforming gendered spaces

The Words for Change project by artist Anna Farago and in collaboration with local community groups focused on gender issues as they relate to violence against women. It addressed all domains of gender equality and advocated for positive attitudinal and actual change utilising the structure of the 10 Essential and Supporting Actions to Reduce the Gendered Drivers of Violence against Women published by Our Watch.

Handwritten quotes or words were screen-printed onto banners, plastered on light boxes, or expressed on colourful bunting and put on display. Local students, men's behaviour change group members, and local women's craft groups participated and provided their ideas to shape the content of this thought-provoking work.

The repetition of local voices – male, female, young and old – expressed in text, framed in a positive, colourful, immersive manner sent powerful, empowering messages to everyone who entered Boronia Mall, Boronia Library, Swinburne University Gallery and Cinema laneway via the light boxes.

Words for Change screen printing workshops included:

• In centre space of Boronia Mall with public: 1 workshop (40 participants)

• Craft groups: 1 workshop in Boronia Library and 2-3 women visited Anna Farago's studio 4 times to continue the work.

• Storytelling workshop at Boronia Library: 1 workshop (3 participants)

• Men's Behaviour Change: observed 2 groups for 2 weeks then worked with a select group of men who volunteered.

• Schools: Years 5-9 (35 + 30 participants)

  - Boronia K-12 College: 2 workshops (each workshop 5 hours duration

  - Scoresby Secondary College: 1 workshop (approximately 5 hours duration)

Images for Framed by Gender published on Knox Facebook and Instagram

Project Reach and Ongoing Gender Equality Promotion

To ensure maximum reach events were published on Knox City Council Facebook sites, the Knox City Council official website and the artists' social media platforms.

To extend the project further, in March 2020 a curated selection of six photographs were installed for twelve months in the Boronia Light boxes. Additionally, following the projects initial installation in Boronia Mall, items were displayed at Boronia Library. Further details are available in Appendix K, in the full report.

The Framed by Gender projects were embedded in community spaces, Boronia Library and Boronia Mall. Due to these locations, the broader community were the audience for the artworks largely as they went about their day-to-day activities. In this setting, an audience was reached that perhaps would not have otherwise considered issues of gender inequality, sparking discussions from a range of standpoints. Workshop participants engaged with these conversations meaningfully, and some had the opportunity to take home their own functional piece of artwork with a gender equality-aligned message that may prompt further dialogue for an ongoing project impact.

The project officer has also considered how learnings from this project could contribute to the Council's pre-existing and future programs targeting gender inequality, to maximise the impact of these initiatives. In particular, the enthusiasm of community partners (including schools) was a major asset that could be harnessed, whilst the resourcing, timelines, and project team must be developed to be appropriate for the size, scope, and intention of projects for best outcomes.

In general the community organisations seemed extremely welcoming of invitations to be involved and perhaps these are little-tapped resources that could be included in further council activity. Schools' keen involvement... Local schools, smaller schools, can be neglected and in my experience, are always welcoming of being tied to local community through projects like this.

(Project Officer reflection, Framed by Gender)

To see a full discussion of the project findings go to page 51 of the full report.

2.6 Yarra Ranges – Balit Bagurrk: Strong Aboriginal Women of the Yarra Ranges

Annie Boorat, sister of William Barak, photographed in 1866 at age 30. Annie is featured in Balit Bagurrk.

Cover image for Balit Bagurrk - an example of Brooke Wandin's weaving.

Project Description

The Yarra Ranges Council has partnered with Oonah Health & Community Services Aboriginal Corporation (formerly HICSA) to create a community-defined publication project based on Balit Bagurrk: Strong Aboriginal Women of the Yarra Ranges.

Balit Bagurrk means 'strong woman' in Woiwurrung, the local language of the Traditional Owners of the Yarra Ranges region, the Wurundjeri people. These women are honoured in a book, launched in March 2021 attended by seventy people (maximum capacity due to COVID restrictions), which shares the stories, poems, and artwork of First Nations women in the Yarra Ranges.

It features historical information, deeply moving personal accounts and photographs to tell the stories of strong Indigenous women whose actions shaped the Yarra Ranges and many who live here.

PROJECT AIMS

- To address gender inequality by questioning dominant narratives.

- To find, explore, celebrate, create awareness, and repeat the stories of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women who have shaped the local community in the past, their descendants, and women leaders in the contemporary Aboriginal community of Yarra Ranges.

- To build knowledge of these women within and outside their own community, shift the historical narrative to include them and provide more inspiration for emerging female leaders.

Image from book launch

Image from Balit Bagurrk workshop

Image from Balit Bagurrk workshop

The publication project was inspired by the history of Aboriginal Community organisations in the Yarra Ranges from the 1970s by women from the community, including the Healesville Aboriginal Cooperative, Swinburne's Oonah, and Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association, as well as the 2018 NAIDOC theme 'Because of her we can'.

These stories have been collected by community engagement and consultation, interviews and through open submissions.

Two workshops were also held, led by the Koorie Circle's Laura Thompson which supported women to share stories and honour a strong Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander friend, mother, grandmother, sister, daughter, Elder or cultural leader.

The workshops also provided an opportunity for different generations of women to connect, develop a new creative skill, earring making, and, of course, have some fun. A video showcasing the workshops is __available here__. The first workshop had 25 participants and the second had seventeen.

Project Reach and Ongoing Gender Equality Promotion

To ensure maximum reach, events were published on social media from local and non-local community organisations, community members and Yarra Ranges Council. The book, Balit Bagurrk: Strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women of the Yarra Ranges is available to buy for $20 at the Yarra Ranges Council Community Links, Memo in Healesville, Yarra Ranges Regional Museum, TarraWarra Museum of Art, Burrinja Cultural Centre and some independent bookstores. Further details are available in Appendix L.

The Balit Bagurrk publication continues to have an impact in the community, given its placement in community centres, organisations, and stores. This acts as ongoing promotion of the gender equality messages that underlie the publication's narratives of and for the local community.

This publication also prompts conversations in the community (such as in participants sharing the book with their family), contributing to significant pride and a meaningful experience of collective empowerment and healing for Balit Bagurrk participants, with greater understanding in the community of Aboriginal women's contributions to shaping the Yarra Ranges.

The wearable art from the workshops may also act as a conversation point for ongoing promotion of gender equality, and the importance of the workshop was evidenced by the requests for a second (that was initially unplanned).

Workshop products

From the Council perspective, the Balit Bagurrk project bolstered the acknowledgement and recognition of intersections of identity (i.e., gender, race, and culture), with the Council taking opportunities to incorporate Balit Bagurrk and its messages into other Council projects. For example, the new Yarra Ranges Council Civic Centre, when completed, will have meeting rooms for Council and community use that are named for key themes people from the Balit Bagurrk project.

The project officer for Balit Bagurrk also noted the value in considering how Balit Bagurrk could contribute to and shape future proposals (such as for Belgrave Survival Day, International Women's Day, the Literary Festival, school talks, and library talks) and the potential for exhibitions and events in local spaces (such as in Council buildings and the Yarra Ranges Regional Museum).

"We are planning for future events when we can. Like holding an exhibition in Council, Lilydale Gallery and Museum and there are lots of opportunities for exhibitions."

(Project Officer, Balit Bagurrk)

To see a full discussion of the project findings go to page 56 of the full report.

2.7 City of Yarra – The Empathy Project

Student workshop incorporating characters from the show

Early childhood educator & primary school children workshops

Project Description

The City of Yarra partnered with Musical Sprouts to create The Empathy Project to explore gender equality for early childhood to Grade 4 children. The Musical Sprouts is a theatre company which integrates music, drama and whole-body learning.

This project included:

- Two experiential workshops for City of Yarra early childhood educators on themes of Positive relationships and Gender Equity in their kindergartens.

- The development of a new musical called Yella and the Feeling Flower which explores diversity, friendship, and social and emotional awareness.

- Two experiential in person workshops with children developing on themes explored in the Yella and the Feeling Flower musical were presented at two primary schools, Sacred Heart School in Fitzroy and Newham Primary School in Newham, Macedon Ranges.

PROJECT AIMS

- To explore empathy in young children, and how by having the opportunity to step into the shoes of the other, we can build respectful relationships and gender equity into education.

- To focus on the universal nature of feelings, and the awareness that comes from acknowledging and naming feelings.

- Two online recorded workshops for Newham Primary School due to COVID-19 lockdown.

- A teacher's educational resource with steps on how to use the themes and tools in the show as well as how to extend on the workshops if they had The Empathy Project in their school.

Images of early childhood educator workshop end of session

Educators as audience members

Images of student workshops

- An album of songs from the show, Yella and the Feeling Flower.

- An interactive game for children to play with their adults at home to extend the conversation from school to the home environment.

- Early childhood educator workshops used creating sculptures and roleplay to explore gender equity and what positive relationships look like.

- Experiential workshops with children involved children creating sculptures of different feelings.

Image from Yella and the Feeling Flower musical show

Project Reach and Ongoing Gender Equality Promotion

The project reported to 105 live audience numbers, 180 views on Facebook, 160 views on Twitter and 1100 website visits. Further details are available in Appendix M.

The project's adaptation to the covid-19 restrictions contributed to enduring resources for ongoing gender equality promotion. The Yella and the Feeling Flower musical was filmed (in addition to the live performance) and animated and is now underline available as a resource for schools, as are workshops for grades K–3. Other enduring resources also provide avenues to continue sharing the messages of The Empathy Project, the album of songs from the show, the downloadable game to explore these themes in the family home, and the teacher's toolkit were planned from the project's outset.

The Empathy Project contributed to the pre-existing commitment and understandings of gender equality at the Council by allowing for new perspectives and new frameworks for future projects. The artists and the project officer involved in the partnership are all very enthusiastic about future projects that could arise from The Empathy Project, and are confident in their ongoing relationship to facilitate this work.

> "
>
> • *I think that children's services, me in particular, have made this great connection with Musical Sprouts [project artists]. I think if they ever wanted to trial new things or discuss things, we will be absolutely open to supporting them because I think it was a great initiative. … I'm pretty confident that we will have an ongoing relationship with the Musical Sprouts, and we haven't planned any projects but gender equality is always at the forefront of what we do at [City of] Yarra [Council].*
> *(The Empathy Project, project officer)*

To see a full discussion of the project findings go to page 63 of the full report.

3 Promising Practice Principles

The practice principles included in this section have been identified to maximise the impact, reach, and opportunities for social change in projects such as GEARTS.

The evaluation also sought to determine whether the projects had incorporated certain characteristics previously identified as likely to enhance the potential effectiveness of arts-based gender equality initiatives. The practice principles included in this section have been identified to maximise the impact, reach, and opportunities for social change in projects such as GEARTS.

The evaluation team examined the aims, activities and findings of the GEARTS projects collectively and individually to identify evidence that the practice principles had been incorporated.

1. Capacity to engender understanding and empathy regarding inequities and discrimination experienced by women.

Many of the GEARTS projects explicitly aimed to share understandings and knowledge of gender-based inequities. This occurred through exhibitions, installations, and events for the general public, as well as through smaller workshop events for project participants to learn from facilitating artists and from each other.

Examples and patterns of inequities and discrimination were highlighted in the challenging of the male-dominance in spaces of leadership (e.g. local Council, through Art for a Better Democracy) and in certain industries (e.g. media and games, through Female Futures and GE Game Jam). Another installation in a shopfront, titled Shop of Opportunity, used mock sale signs displaying statistics to illustrate the lack of diversity and severity of gendered inequities throughout society (Framed by Gender; see images from Hotham Street Ladies Shop of Opportunities).

These projects prompted thoughts, reflections, and discussions of gendered inequity and discrimination among the participants, audiences, and the broader community who viewed the artworks. For example, the statistical inequities that were included in the Shop of Opportunity art installation prompted the general public to react in *"extremes,"* with some people showing pride and others displaying extreme resistance to the message, indicating that awareness and discussion alone are not sufficient to foster understanding and empathy in all people, with resistance to be expected. The 'Play Party,' that exhibited games developed through the GE Game Jam, offered a more experiential approach to the artwork, encouraging attendees to more deeply engage and empathise with these examples of inequity and discrimination (such as the subtle aggression women experience on public transport and the gendered nature of children's toys). The process of having portraits taken for the Art for a Better Democracy project to challenge gender disparity in the Council encouraged participants to connect with each other and develop understandings of this issue.

Within workshops, this understanding and empathy was developed through formal and informal discussion during project development, in which participants discussed their experiences and could explore them as they related to issues of gender equality. This was especially evident in the workshops for Muslim / East African young women who could explore this through casual conversation with facilitating artists who had shared backgrounds, to explore the gendered assumptions behind experiences such as being expected to help cook (whilst older brothers are not), or unpack the use and meaning of the label 'slutty' (Female Futures).

The Empathy Project engendered empathy and understanding as an explicit initial focus of their project, rather than as a secondary development stemming from greater knowledge of inequities. This project, in working with young children, focused on developing non-gendered emotional awareness and acceptance and an empathetic understanding of others' emotionality.

> "
> - *I feel that in order for gender equity to exist, empathy must exist, and an understanding of what it is to be in the shoes of another person and respect another person's point of view. And to do that, my passion is always about helping people experience the other point of view, not just talk about it, but actually experience it. Through the experience of it, you have a deeper learning in your whole body.*
> *(The Empathy Project, artist)*

Additional to this practice principle was the capacity to engender understanding and empathy regarding inequities and discrimination experienced by non-binary or gender-nonconforming people. This occurred through some teams' prominent focus on inclusivity for these groups of people (e.g., using non-gendered language and providing pronoun badges through the GE Game Jam project).

2. Capacity to disrupt gender stereotyping.

Gender stereotyping and the harmful, restrictive effects of these on all genders were a focus for many GEARTS projects, who disrupted these in various ways. Stereotypes such as 'women cannot be good leaders' and 'women do not have the capacity to thrive in male-dominated industries' were explored in terms of real-world impacts on participation and representation with the intention of highlighting the *"ridiculousness"* of these restrictive and harmful narratives.

> "
> - *One of the aims we had was 'disrupt the gender narrative', so political unrest, the media attention, and the community mobilization really achieved those aims*
> *(Art for Democracy, project officer)*

The Art for a Better Democracy project processes and exhibition served to build conversation and deep engagement with this stereotype disruption; an effect that was compounded by backlash and media attention stemming from political unrest. Capacity-building workshops and a call to action facilitated women of the community to embrace their potential for leadership by committing to stand for Council. This effect could have been maximised by including timely follow-up information on the process of becoming a Councillor to encourage follow through on these expressions of interest. Although these were planned and delivered, they were unfortunately delayed due to Covid related restrictions.

Workshops allowed women and non-binary participants to build knowledge, skills, and confidence in male-dominated fields, such as film, podcasting, and game development. This was particularly relevant for areas of these industries that predominantly cater to men, such as technical equipment use that was incorporated in Female Futures. Workshops also provided a forum to challenge and critique outcomes of these gender stereotypes and disparities, such as the heavy reliance on violence in video games. Disruption of gender stereotyping also occurred organically through some project processes, such as in the renovation of a courtyard in the Girls Own Space project, which entailed planning and problem-solving, use of power tools to create aspects of the new courtyard design, and landscaping.

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> • That's a very young women attitude to have about life, that they feel like they are not wanted, that it's a 'Boy's Club', so having that [experience] through this program – letting them know it's just for them. (Female Futures, project officer)

Participants and audiences were encouraged to sustain their confidence to disrupt these stereotypes through continuing to prominently feature women doing this work (e.g., in project outcome dissemination and promotion materials), and creating ongoing communities and relationships. For example, one of the highlights for the Art for a Better Democracy team was that many women wanted to continue the project in terms of mentoring and creating a community of women leaders in Bayside.

This was an unexpected but and potentially long-lasting legacy of the project that led to plans to establish a Women's Leadership Forum on a similar model to the women business network.

3. Uncovering untold women's stories of our past, present and futures.

Uncovering untold women's stories was a focus of many projects, with some projects taking this message onboard for their primary aims, and others allowing this to emerge as a secondary benefit for participants and their communities.

Art for a Better Democracy and Balit Bagurrk both used their platforms to share and celebrate the stories of notable women and girls of their communities. Art for a Better Democracy used portraiture with accompanying biographical notes to share stories of leadership present and future, whereas Balit Bagurrk used oral histories to explore untold stories of Aboriginal women past and present. The celebration of these previously untold stories was significant and meaningful for participants, who also anticipated that this would have a substantial impact in their communities.

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> • Because if stories are not told, they are lost. (Balit Bagurrk, participant)
>
> • "not only sat next to these amazing women, but grew up with some of them, and seeing how we were each influenced for different reasons and having our contributions printed, cements the input we were there to achieve. (Balit Bagurrk, participant)
>
> • I hope it will open eyes and ears to how inspirational indigenous women are and always have been. Hopefully more education and truth telling will lead to the true celebration of the oldest continuing culture in the world. It's important to know local stories, traditional names and languages of the place we live in so that we can have a greater connection and respect. (Balit Bagurrk, participant)

Workshops in which participants produced their own works, such as in the film-making, podcasting, and game development workshops run through Female Futures and GE Game Jam, allowed space for participants to tell their own story through an artistic medium.

4. Shining a light on potentially unhealthy and unsafe cultures or environments (e.g., heavily male dominated sporting clubs, workplaces).

GEARTS projects collectively upheld this principle using a dual focus: challenging unhealthy and unsafe environments for women and non-binary people; and actively creating inclusive spaces and cultures that foster wellbeing and a sense of belonging.

Identifying, challenging, and transforming heavily male-dominated environments was a prominent focus. Through this process, projects worked against the detrimental impacts of these cultures on all within them, particularly women (Chan, Lam, Chow, & Cheung, 2008). These impacts include increased rates of sexism and harassment, increased pressure to conform to norms of masculinity (with paradoxical negative appraisal for doing so), reduced support, lower self-esteem, and poorer psychological, emotional and physical health (Chan et al., 2008; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Jackson, 2001; Jackson, Hillard, & Schneider, 2014; Liang, Dornan, & Nestel, 2019; Madsen & Andrade, 2018; Sojo, Wood, & Genat, 2016).

Art for Democracy highlighted the contributions made by many notable women in Bayside demonstrating the strength of female leadership in the community and their potential to contribute to local government as elected councillors. This was contrasted with their underrepresentation on Council, which historically and currently is predominantly male. The Shop of Opportunity installation, in the Framed by Gender project, highlighted these issues through use of statistics relating to the underrepresentation of women in Parliament and on the boards of major companies.

Female Futures and GE Game Jam aimed to create inclusive communities of women and non-binary people in the largely male-dominated spaces of the media and gaming industries. Participants were empowered to thrive in these spaces through developing opportunities for building skills, confidence, and social connection and a sense of belonging. Incorporating mentors who were also women and non-binary people played a significant role in the success of these communities and collectives, as is aligned with research demonstrating that female mentors contribute to the development of increased feelings of belonging, belief in themselves, motivation, self-efficacy for female mentees, with higher retention within male-dominated contexts

(Bhatia & Amati, 2010; Dennehy & Dasgupta, 2017). Masculine norms in these spaces, such as the reliance on violence for entertainment and story-telling, were also challenged with the promotion of non-violent and positive women's stories.

> "
> - *During the course of this project, and as a consequence of the broader #metoo movement, some of the problems within the industry around sexual harassment were exposed. The creation of an inclusive event addressing gender inequalities provides an opportunity to shine a light on and push back against the unhealthy norms within the game development industry. Additionally, the games created in the game jam avoided the stereotypes of violence often heavily relied upon in the games industry… Despite the games industry being over-represented by men, this project successfully engaged a majority of GE Game Jam participants and mentors who identified as female or non-binary. (GE Game Jam, project officer)*

Girls Own Space explored the extent to which women and girls can feel unsafe in public spaces, with projects claiming and transforming spaces within local communities – some of which had very negative reputations – to foster a sense of inclusivity and belonging. These projects contributed to substantial conversations around marginalisation related to gender and sexuality in the community, resulting in realisations of the positive impacts of inclusivity. This is aligned with research showing the power of critical placemaking to facilitate dialogue for more inclusive community narratives and empowerment and conscientisation of communities (Toolis, 2017).

> "
> - *I talked to young women who were in the park, asked what were they doing, and it turned out that quite a few young people do use that park, but not at night. It was considered unsafe. It had a reputation. The teenagers I spoke to called it 'Paedo Park'. (Girls Own Space, artist)*
> - *We wanted to transform the space that exists now into one that was more inclusive and safe for women and other marginalised groups, people that don't always feel safe.*
> *(Girls Own Space, project officer)*

5. Validating self and collective expressions by creating visibility of women in public spaces.

The promotion and exhibition of all GEARTS projects in public spaces was central in upholding this practice principle, with projects focusing on sharing creative expressions of women in their exhibitions, showcases, releases, and reveals. Positive community reception enhanced the sense of validation associated with these projects, drawing on the concept of critical placemaking to allow access and transform public places into "spaces of dialogue, inclusion, and democratic participation" (Toolis, 2017, p.195).

> "
> - *The entire project is highly visible, with artwork outcomes exhibited in several public spaces: Boronia Mall, Boronia Library, Swinburne University and Cinema Lane Lightboxes, and through an extensive social media campaign including project films and photos and the potential for use of a poster campaign series by Council as a future asset to use for example when promoting 16 days of activism. (Framed By Gender, project officer)*
> - *We had others who were so pleased to see something like this [Gender Inequality Statistics in Art form] in Boronia, like students, younger people usually. (Framed by Gender, project officer)*

Female Futures, Framed by Gender, and GE Game Jam facilitated self and collective expressions through workshops, in which participants developed their own projects as individuals or in small groups. The showcase of these at the conclusion of the projects encouraged conversation and validation of these expressions, contributing to feelings of empowerment and joy for participants.

> "
> - *It seemed that the outcome of all of it for each of them was similar in that they felt that they had worked hard for something and put a part of their self out in the world. And there was a real sense of elation, at the end of that. (Female Futures, artist)*

> "
> - *Certainly, at the showcase – which was a group Signal showcase so there were multiple different groups who'd been working on different projects there showcasing them – but a couple of the students got up and said how much the workshop meant to them, and how much they learned, and one of them said that they wouldn't be up on the stage unless- that it was because of the confidence that she gained through the workshop. (Female Futures, artist)*

Some projects contributed to a collective expression, such as the portrait exhibition through Art for Democracy and the documented oral history book through Balit Bagurrk. These projects were highly visible, with the former being exhibited in the council chambers and online, and the latter being available at many prominent community locations, including museums, cultural centres, and local council community centres.

Girls Own Space worked to claim and transform public spaces in communities with the collective creative expressions of participants. In these spaces, communities tended to interpret the projects as a (very welcome) infrastructure upgrade, with the true gender equality message and validation of women's expression being less frequently identified.

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> - *The tunnel [Korumburra] is strange in that it was so dilapidated yet well-known and well used. Many people in the town have had ideas for its refurbishment and what this should look like. Opinion on what should happen in the GOS project is rife within the town. Some residents love it, others think that this is a waste of opportunity. There is very little understanding of the underlying value to participants in this project, (young women being handed an opportunity), instead it is seen by the vast majority in terms of a much-needed infrastructure upgrade. Publicly 'claiming' this space has taken an enormous amount of courage from the artists and participants involved. (Girls Own Space, project officer)*

6. Potential for scalability.

All GEARTS projects had evident potential for scalability and increased reach. The inclusion of online platforms for promotion and visibility of project outcomes allowed the art and messages to reach much wider audiences in a range of contexts, rather than the immediate local community that was the focus of in-person events. Some project teams noted that creating a digital resource or platform for the projects would allow for much greater longevity, as the art and messages can continue to be delivered without a sustained high workload within the project team.

Some projects had already utilised these formats, either as their original intention or as adaptation to the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, such as the online exhibition of Art for a Better Democracy's portraits and biographies, and in the videoed shows and workshops of The Empathy Project.

Others considered how their localised projects could be adapted to the online space. Podcasting as a format was noted for its potential in storytelling and amplifying women's narratives, and was considered as an alternative form to the printed book created in Balit Bagurrk. Other scalability potentials were explored in considering translations to other communities. For example, Balit Bagurrk, in compiling Aboriginal women's stories, was considered a conceptual anchor, an idea which could be extended and applied in other places and with other groups of people. The portraiture exhibition of Art for a Better Democracy has been proposed for a "*roadshow*," with its success generating interest within other councils to do parallel projects. The games developed through the GE Game Jam have been shown at the Penny Arcade Expo (PAX) Australia 2019, the largest gaming forum in the Southern hemisphere, and continue to be hosted for free on partner organisations' websites.

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> • *We have [the filmed version of our show] now, that we're editing, that can reach people far and wide which we're so thrilled about. This message could go internationally, there's no reason why we can't reach quite a wide number of students with the show and the workshops, and I want to keep making more workshops on the different themes in the show. It's a great starting point.*
> *(The Empathy Project, artist)*

> "
>
> • *I just think there should be volume two! There are so many more stories to tell... What exists in this, the potential in this book is the opportunity for extensions. It's an anchor, and even if it was volume two, or three, or it morphed into something else digitally with podcasts or something like that, I think that thinking about this project as a standalone initiative would be really limiting its full potential to have an impact. I really hope that someone can harness that and be the shepherd for taking that work forward. Because it's got more to give than a simple book. (Balit Bagurrk, artist)*
>
> • *Other councils had actually called me about possibly doing a similar thing. So I was going to engage with them to see if that's something we could follow up on. We were thinking about doing a roadshow [of] the portraits. We were putting the portraits in the head office of Council, so more people could see it. (Art for a Better Democracy, project officer)*

Project teams also considered how to expand the reach of their projects to engage diverse groups in their communities. This entailed holding additional events alongside main projects (such as talks, seminars, and interviews), using relationships with local organisations for increased promotion and engagement, and being intentional in approach to foster inclusivity and ensure everyone felt welcome. Some projects also built communities, such as a film collective for women and non-binary filmmakers, to extend and continue the project outcomes and gender equality messages beyond the initial timeline. It should be noted that many original plans needed to be adapted due to the limitations.

> • *We were going to run artists talks and industry talks at the exhibition in the auditorium which is right next to the gallery. It is an easy, effective way to engage the general public, and also to attract young people, because that demographic is something we haven't had involved really in the project yet. (Framed by Gender, project officer)*
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> • *I think that is to continue, like having a female film collective at Signal with Hannah who was the original artist and I also know that podcasting artists, there's more opportunities for them to run more podcasting. (Female Futures, project officer)*

It should be noted that many original plans needed to be adapted due to the limitations inherent in Covid 19 restrictions that impacted the implementation and completion dates of most projects. This also affected the alignment of evaluation interviews and project timelines, which may explain the lack of definitive plans in some of the above examples. However, the uncertainty may also be indicative of the difficulties associated in maintaining momentum once a discrete project is completed and indicates that the responsibility for extending the work needs to be delegated to someone in a leadership role in the sponsoring organisation (i.e., Council).

7. Potential for added value through opportunity, publicity, prominence and partnership.

This principle was upheld by all GEARTS projects, in part by the inherent prominence of council initiatives and with the partnerships that were the bedrock for the project development and delivery. All projects provided opportunities for their project teams, participants, and communities through their processes and outcomes.

Opportunities largely arose through projects' engagement with their communities, which fostered settings in which those who had been marginalised – such as women and girls – were empowered to begin and continue community-relevant initiatives. For example, through Art for a Better Democracy's awareness and consciousness-raising of the potential for women to lead in the community, participants and members of the community drew together to support each other through mentorship and community connection. These settings also allowed for social connections to form, for participants to feel valued and a sense of belonging in new friendships.

> • *Many women [are] wanting to continue he project in terms of mentoring and creating a community of women leaders in Bayside. This was unexpected, but a really important and potentially long-lasting legacy of the project. (Art for a Better Democracy, project officer)*
>
> • *I think the best way to do that is just to continually maintain engagement with them and continually look at ways to support them like giving them a platform or looking at projects to help increase awareness, or projects that need elevating. And grant support, so continually just increasing engagement with them, that in turn builds trust and that builds pride, and integrity, and all of those things. (Balit Bagurrk, project officer)*
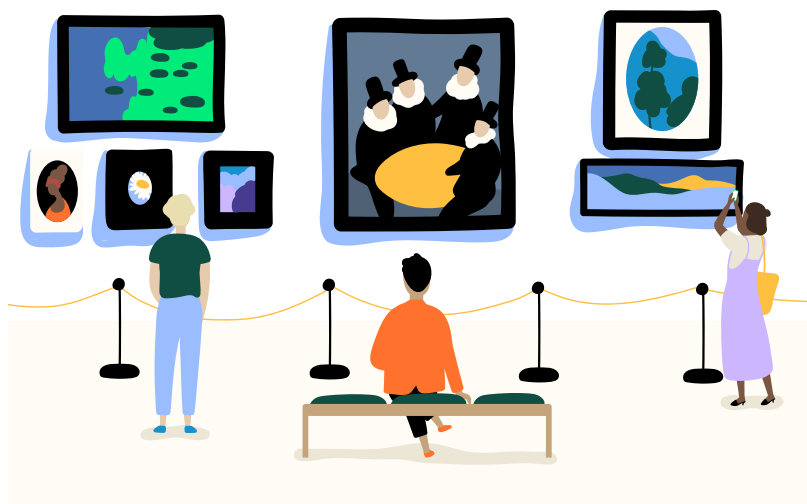
Another opportunity arose from the learnings gained in the Female Futures project where young women from asylum seeker backgrounds joined students from a Melbourne school to plan a workshop and tour of the National Gallery of Victoria.

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> • *One key learning was integrating Australian born young women and matching them up with the school [students]. The young women were happy just to have the opportunity to do the art, as a lot of them have very little money. Also getting the connections – they were happy to meet the Australian born young women, not just to practice English, but to hang out with each other (Female Futures, project officer)*

Opportunities for added value through future work also arose through the increased motivation and sense of capacity and confidence of the project teams. Within the council setting, this contributed to changes in understanding of art and community arts projects, and a reaffirmation of the importance of gender equality initiatives.

There was added value evident in the publicity and promotion of many of the projects, which all featured on social media and other online spaces, with some also having print and radio media promotion (e.g., in newspapers and local community magazines). Substantial publicity was generated for one of the projects, Art for a Better Democracy, as a result of the controversy it generated within the community where elements of the project were viewed as denigrating to men. This negative publicity was seen as a significant benefit for the project in generating further attention and providing a forum to address the resistance to the gender equality message.

Added value was also seen through the prominence of projects, which benefited from the promotion and publicity in their communities as amplified through the influence of local councils. Some projects were also highly visible in their communities, which added to their prominence and the value seen in generating discussion around the project messages and outcomes. The scalability opportunities also presented further potential for prominence, notably the display of GE Game Jam games at PAX Australia, the largest convention of its kind in the country.

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> • *For a lot of developers, especially devs just starting out, showing at an event like PAX is a bit of a pipedream… Having a space where that can happen is really big for a lot of people – not only making it a space where that can happen at all, but making it a space where games about something different, like gender equality, is a really big thing for a lot of devs.*
> *(GE Game Jam, participant)*

Partnerships were the foundation of all GEARTS projects, offering significant added value for the projects, their organisations, and project outcomes. These partnerships within the project facilitated complementary skills and broadened the reach of the projects due to combined professional networks. These partnerships created motivation to continue in future collaborations. Developing partnerships outside of the project team also provided potential to broaden the scope of the GEARTS projects and messages, as in Art for a Better Democracy working with the Victorian Local Governments Association and the partnerships formed with community groups in South Gippsland in the Girls Own Space project.

8. Capacity to evaluate and contribute to an emerging evidence base.

The VicHealth GEARTS funding program has provided an opportunity for the seven projects to contribute new knowledge in relation to what works at a grass-roots level for using the Arts as a medium for promoting gender equality, raising the visibility of women and challenging gender stereotypes. There was tremendous variation in the aims, approaches and level of engagement with participants and audiences across the projects. There were also differences in the professional background and area of expertise brought to the projects by members of the project teams. Access to resources within council organisations also varied. These factors resulted in differences in the capacity or resources of the seven projects to undertake their own evaluation.

The approach employed in the evaluation to identify common themes across the projects to evaluate the whole program has helped address the challenges inherent in the diversity of project goals and approaches. More importantly, the model of collaborating individually with each of the projects to provide resources and support as needed has helped mitigate the challenges the less resourced projects (in terms of evaluation-know how) might have faced in undertaking their individual evaluations. This approach acknowledges the importance of adequate resourcing to ensure equity and capacity, consistent with an empowerment approach to evaluation (Fetterman, 2017).

4 Conclusion and Recommendations
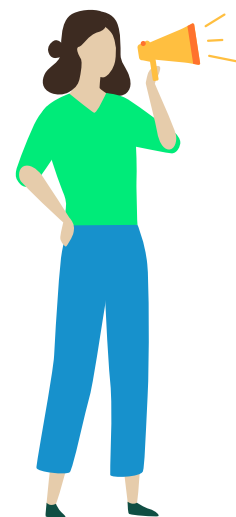
4.1 Conclusion

The VicHealth Gender Equality through the Arts (GEARTS) program funded seven Victorian Councils to deliver diverse arts initiatives in partnership with arts and creative industries that promoted gender equality. The seven arts-based projects presented within this report have contributed to the promotion of gender equality in engaging, innovative and sometimes controversial ways. They have:

• raised awareness of gender inequality;

• provided new perspectives on gender roles;

• highlighted the strength, capability and contribution of women; and

• provided opportunities and role models for young women and women of marginalized groups that were inspiring and empowering.

The empowerment of women was a dominant narrative that was evident throughout the varied sources of data. Empowerment occurred through the provision of strong female role models, highlighting the achievements of women and giving voice and validation to untold stories of women's achievement. It also occurred by providing opportunities to women and providing new perspectives on the potential for them to be successful in male dominated arenas. Social and professional connections were also experienced as inspiring forms of empowerment.

The seven projects utilized two fundamental processes or strategies to achieve their gender equality goals. Some projects focused on public facing initiatives where the primary goal was to increase awareness of gender inequality and challenge gender stereotypes by creating artworks that stimulated discussion within the community. Other projects focused on the women who participated in the arts initiatives with the primary intention of providing experiences and opportunities that were empowering and contributed to overcoming the inequality these mostly young women faced. The artworks created in these projects could be thought of as products that attested to the strength, creativity and potential of the project participants. All projects combined the two strategies to some degree. Given these two fundamental strategies have different underlying primary aims, it is not possible to compare them in terms of effectiveness. On the one hand, public facing initiatives have more potential to broadly raise awareness of gender inequality; whether that equates to attitude change is more difficult to ascertain. On the other hand, participant focused projects have the potential to profoundly affect a relatively smaller number of participants; however, the long-term impact of their experiences cannot readily be determined. Overall, it can be surmised that projects that are designed to incorporate substantial components of both strategies increase the potential for change.

Strong partnerships between artists and Council were central to the success of projects. Project success was also enhanced when Council provided good governance, ongoing support and necessary resources from other departments such as media, arts and community engagement. Similarly, project teams were enhanced with the inclusion of multidisciplinary team members. Some projects tended to be driven by a single project officer. This increases the risk of projects being stalled if staff changes occur. Effective communication between partners, maximizing complementary skills and the influence of powerful advocates within Council contributed to project success. Projects also engaged with community groups and external organisations to increase community uptake and embeddedness. This occurred either from the outset as a planned strategy or evolved as the project was implemented. Engagement with external organisations with gender equity expertise enabled the delivery of appropriate content for those projects that included an education element. This is an effective way to compensate for any lack of available gender equality expertise within Council.

The importance of effective partnership and good governance is particularly pertinent in responding to backlash. Several projects, particularly those with strong, confronting messages that challenged the privileged position of men and subjugation of women, experienced various forms of backlash that threatened the viability of the projects. However, each project rose to the challenge and the problems presented by the backlash were resolved. This sometimes involved compromise, with some adjustment to original plans.

This was most likely when other organisations or the private sector had a stake in the project and the ability to withdraw support. In contrast, there is evidence it is also possible to resist challenges to the project that ensue from backlash and successfully advocate for the continued implementation of the original vision. A strong partnership between artists and project officers, with advocacy from Council officers in positions of influence is most effective in achieving a successful outcome. The arguments that are presented to support the project when combatting backlash offer important opportunities to raise awareness and engage allies for gender equality.

The outcomes of the GEARTS grants program reinforce the value of the Arts as an instrument of social change for gender equality promotion. The artworks provide enduring messages that advocate gender equality in innovative, entertaining, inspiring and sometimes controversial ways. The projects provided new opportunities for artists and empowering experiences for participants and audiences. The local Council context proved to be an appropriate setting for gender equality promotion. Councils' local knowledge, community engagement expertise and existing community relationships enhanced project implementation and community uptake. Community connections are readily made and partnerships forged for the gender equality work are more likely to be maintained beyond the life of the project due to the geographical connection and other commonalities. These community-based arts projects demonstrate the potential of art to connect, motivate and empower communities and community members for gender equality promotion.

4.2 Recommendations

It is hoped the findings described in this report will provide practical ideas and guidance to future arts-based gender equality initiatives. The following recommendations are presented according to the various project roles.

Funders

- The model used by VicHealth where Councils partnered with artists/art organisations to develop unique projects was successful in providing the partnerships with substantial local discretion in designing their projects. This model was effective in producing a diverse range of innovative projects that were both public facing and participant focussed and, for the most part, responded to the unique needs and characteristics of their communities. Future projects should similarly be encouraged to design unique projects that are appropriate for their local community.

- Community of Practice workshops were well attended and received positive feedback reinforcing the need for this form of support. Professional and peer support and shared learning is strongly recommended for those working on Gender Equality and Arts initiatives. Funders should consider providing opportunities for Communities of Practice to enable partners to build their capacity in delivering gender equality messages and responding to resistance to gender equality initiatives, share experiences and resources, and provide collegial support.

- Funders should provide resources to prepare partnerships for potential resistance and backlash. This could include workshop funding to develop the project rationale, ensuring it articulates the way the artwork messaging or project activities meet the overarching aims. This can inform subsequent strategies to manage backlash. In addition, support for the experience of backlash during the life of the project is required, in particular for more aggressive forms of backlash. Community of practice workshops provide a forum for teams to safely discuss problems and solutions. Some projects may also benefit from individual support.

- Funders should ensure project proposals consider how the gender equality message of the artwork can be extended beyond the life of the project.

Local Council (or other organisation responsible for leading the project)

- Council should ensure project teams are multidisciplinary, wherever possible, to maximise the effectiveness of complementary skills such as expertise in community engagement, gender equality and the arts. Consider partnering with external organisations to augment gender equality expertise. It is also beneficial for the team to include representation of the target community, particularly for intercultural projects.

- Project teams should have the full support of other relevant council departments, especially media and public relations.

- Advocacy is an important element of project success, especially in response to resistance and backlash. Ideally there should be strong and continued support for the project within Council management as well as from Councillors. Such support from project "champions" should strive to enhance connections within Council and build external relationships and support for the project to ensure the momentum for change extends beyond the life of the project.

- Council could consider various levels and forms of community engagement to enhance community relevance and ownership. This could range from community consultation in project development, to involvement in various stages of implementation to full responsibility for the entire project.

- Consider the naming of projects and the representation of diversity in the naming process to foster inclusivity for marginalised groups, specifically the use of non-gendered language to foster inclusion for transgender women and non-binary people. Gender exclusive language has been found to contribute to group-based ostracism and thus should be avoided where possible or used selectively as relevant to the intended audience (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011).

- Local councils should be prepared to maximise the effectiveness of projects by garnishing the momentum created by projects and carrying it forward in subsequent initiatives. For example, the relationships formed with community groups and organisations should be continued with future plans for additional gender equality collaborative action.

  - Follow up on the learnings from workshops within partnerships such as those with schools and community groups to continue to reinforce the language and ideas raised in the workshops and provide resources for partners to continue promoting gender equality.
  - Opportunities to use the artworks to deliver the GE message beyond the initial project should be built into the project plan and pursued after project completion.
  - Councils could consider creating project archives projects on public facing websites.

Partnerships

- Partnerships between Council and artists/ art organisations provide an effective setting for gender equality work. The inclusion of external organisations and community groups can enhance the scope and effectiveness of projects.

- Ensure all those involved in the partnership are prepared for experiencing and managing resistance and potential backlash. This is especially pertinent if the artwork is likely to be perceived as controversial or confronting, such as portraying the predatory nature of some men. In such cases, it may be useful to pilot the project, seeking feedback to inform the final implementation.

- Invest time in early partnership establishment for all parties to establish common goals and to understand each other's expectations and limitations. This is particularly important if there are potential conflicts of interest. Partners should be prepared to troubleshoot potential areas of conflict as soon as possible so that projects do not get derailed, especially in response to resistance and backlash. See the Partnership Analysis Tool (VicHealth, 2016).

- Engage advocates for social change that strengthen the collaborative partnerships and provide opportunities to empower individuals as well as the wider community to mobilise change.

Project teams

- Good communication and skill sharing were elements of successful project teams and partnerships. Teams should ensure artists are kept well informed, especially when new artists are brought into projects or staff changes occur within teams. Skill-building and networking opportunities for artists, especially solo artists will increase capacity and perceived support as well as facilitate project success. All staff working with specific target groups will benefit from the provision of opportunities to enhance cultural sensitivity (e.g., working with young people, people with disability, and people from specific ethic groups).

- A multi-platform approach to include online as well as face-to-face engagement is recommended to encourage wider engagement and allow a more flexible approach to participation.

- Cultural safety, responsiveness and representation along with the provision of a female/non-binary space were found to facilitate discussion of gender equality and the critical examination of gender roles. Female artists from a similar ethnic background to workshop participants provided empowering role models. Future projects should seek to create safe spaces with the inclusion of female / non-binary team members and cultural representation in workshop facilitation, to ensure all voices are empowered.

- Strong female leadership was a feature of most projects and is recommended for future projects. However, men's involvement in gender equality work should not be discouraged; they can be powerful advocates and bring many skills to a project. Previous research has noted care needs to be taken to ensure gendered power relations are not recreated when men are working alongside women (Seymour, 2017).

- Prepare strategies and resources well in advance to respond to backlash and criticism. Be prepared for critical or aggressive emails.

  - The use of a project specific email address rather than individual staff member emails is recommended to share the load of responding, remove the sense of individual targeting, and decrease associated stress. Prepared responses can be used as determined by the team to reduce personal impact. See (En)countering resistance: Strategies to respond to resistance to gender equality initiatives (VicHealth, 2018)

  - Art installations that are not staffed could provide additional information, perhaps in the form of signage that provides the context of the artwork and the aims of the project. See Framing gender equality – Message guide (VicHealth, 2021) for ways to frame messages that are appropriate for a persuadable audience.

  - Projects that involve workshops with participants should ensure participants understand the project aims and the ways in which the artworks or activities address those aims.

Artists and creative industries

- Artists should endeavour to participate in community of practice sessions and early planning stages of projects as much as possible to maximise understanding of the project goals and ensure a shared vision for the artwork.

  - Artists who are employed during project implementation for specific aspects of the project such as workshop facilitation should ensure they are fully informed about the project and its goals and seek the information and support they need to successfully complete their work.

- Artists should be prepared for the experience of backlash, work collaboratively with partners to seek solutions if it occurs and potentially destabilises the project, and seek support from partners if it is experienced as stressful.

- Although not essential to project success, those artists who worked with other artists noted the benefits in terms of providing support, mitigating stress and utilising complementary skills. If feasible, artists should consider partnering with other artists.

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