

# Creative Connections

Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing through  
Community Arts Participation



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*The strength of the community arts process is its ability to bring diverse people together around a common project and sense of purpose.*

This document details learnings from the Community Arts Participation Scheme funded under the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation's Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999-2002.



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- p 1 – Venetian Houses Artist: Megan Evans (mentor) & Shanrah Austin
- p 3 – Photographer: Sharon Jones. Event: SNAP, part of FAST (24 Hour Actions) – Geelong Alliance.
- p 7 – Project: Shepparton Car Arts.
- p 13 – Photographer: Sharon Jones. Event: SNAP, part of FAST (24 Hour Actions) – Geelong Alliance.
- p 21 – Project: Next Wave.
- p 22,23 – ‘Xena Ponders Blue’ series. Artwork: Adam. Nature vs Culture Project.
- p 47 – Artist: Daniel. Photography: Tim Gresham.
- p 49,51 – ‘Terra Nullius’ by the Courthouse Youth Arts Centre, Geelong. Photography: Glenn Romanis.
- p 53,55 – ‘High Rise’ by Polyglot Puppet Theatre. Photography: Carlos Santos and Lena Cirillo.
- p 57,59 – ‘Dragons and Angels’ by Wangaratta Arts Council. Photography: courtesy of Border Mail.
- p 61,63 – ‘Shimmer’ by Platform Youth Theatre, Darebin City Council – Arts and Cultural Planning Branch. Photography: Ponch Hawkes.
- p 65,67 – ‘A(Maze)’ by Bentleigh Bayside Community Health Service. Photography: Sanya Pahoki.

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## Foreword

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We live in a time of great fear and uncertainty. In such times we need the tools to humanise us and make us civil.

One of the greatest of these tools is art. It can inspire us – literally, from the Latin, to breathe new breath into us, or by delighting us, take our breath away. Art puts us in awe of the human spirit and its ability to struggle, question, achieve and triumph. Even more importantly, at present art offers us the opportunity to gather together publicly to share those transforming experiences, to be human, to be at our best and most beautiful – together. To sit with friends, lovers, family and say ‘Isn’t that beautiful?’ or of artists ‘Aren’t they amazing?’ I can think of no greater healing power than that, and that is what art does at any time.

At present, in addition to my own singing, I curate festivals. Festivals are many things to many people but they are certainly filled with moments of awe and discovery. They give us the arts experience on a grand scale and in excess. Large numbers of people over many days and nights gather together to share in public the feeling that they are witnessing beauty, skill, optimism, positivism. In short, they feel alive again – they feel well.

Art, and art en masse as in festivals, often has exactly the same purpose as good businesses or trusts or welfare and health departments – we just want life to be better, richer, more inspiring. That’s why partnerships in the arts can be so productive. We are all involved in matters of good citizenship, working towards a society where creativity in all fields is nurtured, respected, appreciated and applauded.

I am not just talking about ‘pretty’ here. Sometimes the health of individuals and communities depends on being confronted with the hard stuff of life. Matters of health and welfare are central to the arts. Sometimes this is just because to see or hear something beautiful and inspiring is healthy for mind and body. But intellectual stimulation is essential for good health and art has this everywhere – tough issues delivered through an energising medium. Time and again we see kids, youth, mature individuals and entire communities benefiting from their participation in the arts. Sometimes it’s the physicality of dance or theatre or singing, sometimes the hand-eye-mind challenge of music making, sometimes just being around colour, sometimes just learning the great humanising art of collaboration.

As an individual singer of high profile and wide experience I have long understood the connection between art and health. A severe asthmatic from two years old, I probably would have had a very different life if my singer/comedian father had not encouraged me to sing. Now as both singer and Festival Director, I see how the links between art and health are infinite, the good they can do in sector partnerships also limitless. This is not rhetoric, this is a reality. Let’s give it strength.



Robyn Archer AO

Singer, writer, director.

Artistic Director, Melbourne International Arts Festival

# OVERVIEW



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## Introduction

### Factors impacting on mental health and wellbeing

**Social connectedness:** *social and community connectedness, stable and supportive environments, a variety of social and physical activities, access to social networks and supportive relationships, a valued social position.*

**Freedom from discrimination and violence:** *physical security, opportunity for self-determination, control of one's life.*

**Economic participation:** *access to work, meaningful engagement, education, adequate housing and money.*

*(VicHealth Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002)*

In 1999, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) developed its Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002, establishing a framework for the development of research and program activity over a three-year period. Central to this framework is a focus on three determinants of mental health: social connectedness, valuing diversity and economic participation.

The Community Arts Participation Scheme (CAP Scheme) was one of a number of schemes established under the Mental Health Promotion Plan. The Scheme was launched in 1999 and is a major pillar of VicHealth's Arts for Health Program.

This Scheme marked a move away from investment in the arts through sponsorships with a health message toward a more integrated and involved partnership with arts and community organisations. This partnership aims to increase participation and access for disadvantaged groups while contributing to the building of community.

This report documents the findings from the evaluation of the CAP Scheme and the key lessons learned. It is one of a series of reports of VicHealth-funded mental health promotion activity which will:

- contribute to knowledge about the processes of promoting mental health and wellbeing;
- assist VicHealth and its community, government and business sector partners in future planning of mental health promotion activity in Victoria;
- provide information to assist VicHealth in the further development and implementation of mental health promotion activity; and
- support ongoing development of mental health promotion projects at the field level.

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



## Summary of learnings

### Mental health benefits of participation

#### Enhanced social connectedness

- Social connections are facilitated across individuals, groups, families and communities through the CAP Scheme. These connections extend to political, social and environmental contexts. The level of connection achieved is particularly significant in the context of the Scheme's participants who experience disadvantage through social, geographic or economic circumstances and validates the importance of community arts as an effective health promotion intervention.
- The strength of the community arts process is its ability to bring diverse people together around a common project and sense of purpose. People are exposed to and gain a greater understanding of others and potentially a greater sense of social connection. Friends and associates are made and opportunities for positive interactions are expanded.
- Community arts projects can enhance the skills of participants, improving their ability to function at broader political, social and environmental levels. Through the artwork, these projects provided the important dual benefits of connecting socially isolated participants to the mainstream and connecting the mainstream to the socially isolated participants.
- The process of public acknowledgement through presentation of quality work arising from the project is an important aspect of connecting individuals to the wider community.

#### Valuing diversity and working against discrimination and violence

- The arts can provide a powerful tool for advocacy by creating and enlarging understanding of unfamiliar people and issues.
- Participating in community arts projects impacts on an individual's personal development and identity in the community. People can shift from the confines of being classified through deficits – 'young person at risk', 'drug addict', 'homeless person' – to active descriptions of what they can do – actor, painter, singer, artist.
- Public recognition through presentation of work brings a sense of pride to participants and allows the general public to gain an appreciation of the talents of people that they may otherwise never encounter and may hold fears and prejudices about.

*The CAP Scheme gives many people access to creative art forms and activities, social and health support services and a supportive group of peers and professionals which they would otherwise not have.*

### **Economic participation and meaningful engagement**

- Skill development is observed through participation in community arts projects. Teamwork and communication are inherent to all good community arts practice and are skills nationally recognised by the vocation and educational sector as being 'common to all work'.
- Increased self-esteem was reported by participants as a result of involvement in the projects. Increased self-esteem is linked to self-confidence and the ability to explore otherwise daunting options.

## **Organisational capacity building**

### **Capacity to implement mental health promotion activity**

- Cluster meetings of projects funded through the Scheme provided a valuable forum for information exchange, enhanced sector learnings and increased the capacity of practitioners to understand the links between mental health promotion and the arts.
- Successful recruitment of participants was more likely when there were clear understandings between the referral agency (such as a youth support agency or school) and the community arts officer/organisation.
- Further professional development in health promotion for the arts sector is required. Developing this understanding is particularly important for skilling practitioners to evaluate and effectively document the health benefits of participation in community arts activities.
- Assistance in securing funding support from sources outside the arts sector is crucial. With greater funding, longer-term projects could be developed, project activities could be more effectively embedded in local communities, long-term project outcomes could be evaluated, and skills and expertise in arts and health could be developed and retained.

### **Access issues**

- Access to transport was the greatest barrier experienced by projects involving young people, particularly those based in rural and regional Victoria. Although this issue is not particular to this Scheme, increased organisational activity to address this barrier is required.



## Partnerships

- Partnerships are effective in increasing the resources available to a project to support recruitment, provide health and welfare links, and expand networks.
- All projects developed some level of partnership, with varying degrees of formality. The success of partnerships was influenced by factors such as whether the relationship had been previously tested and whether there were shared understandings of the project aims and how the partnership would function.
- There is a clear rationale for encouraging partnerships from arts and health sectors to develop community arts activity. However, it needs to be recognised that there are resource pressures in maintaining the partnerships.

## Sustainable models of good practice

- Sustainability relies on the project, program, organisation, partnerships and community all having a long-term focus.
- Sustainable activity is achieved when the activity is:
  - located within a sustained program;
  - embedded within the organisation's strategic goals;
  - enhanced by strong partnerships;
  - recognised by the community; and
  - supported by project workers with a skill base drawn from both the health and arts sector.
- Short-term funding limits overall sustainability. Sustainability in an arts and health context relies on a skill base spanning both fields. This skill base is still in development in Victoria.
- Project planning, development of shared understandings of the project between project partners, transparent management processes, appropriate staff skills and strategies, appropriate support for participants and contingency planning are all important for success.

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- There is a continued role for VicHealth to:
    - promote the benefits and develop clear understandings of creative arts participation to the health sector, general public and governments;
    - develop the community/arts sectors' knowledge and understanding of health and health promotion; and
    - bring sectors together in project partnerships to explore common interests.
  - VicHealth should consider providing more substantial and longer-term support to a small number of sufficiently developed projects.

# THE PROMOTION OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

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## Why invest in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing?

There is increasing concern by governments worldwide about the rising incidence of mental illness and its social and economic costs. Some improvements have been made through advances in treatment and rehabilitation of those who develop mental illness. However, there is a growing recognition 'that a significant reduction in the (social and economic) costs associated with mental illness will not be achieved purely by activities at the treatment end of the spectrum but will require interventions that impact earlier in the developmental trajectory of mental health problems' (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care 1999).

Efforts to promote mental health and wellbeing and to prevent mental illness can reap important social and economic benefits. They can:

- contribute to improved physical health, with research indicating that there are links between emotional stress and a range of diseases and conditions, including asthma, viral infection, immune disorders, diabetes and cardiovascular disease (Scanlon, Williams & Raphael 1997; Cohen, Tyrell & Smith 1991; Brunner 1997; Wilkinson 1996; Wilkinson & Marmot 1998). Certain mental health problems may also lead to behaviours which place people at higher risk of developing physical health problems. This is illustrated in the link between anxiety and smoking (Orley 1998);
- contribute to improved productivity at work, school and home. It is estimated that mental health disorders account for one-third of days lost from work due to ill-health (Williams et al. 1986; Jenkins 1985). Around 5% of Australians experience anxiety symptoms which are sufficiently severe as to interfere with tasks of daily living, such as holding down a job or maintaining relationships (ABS 1997); and
- reduce mental ill-health and its associated social and economic costs. The World Bank and the World Health Organization estimate that mental health problems contribute 10% of the global burden of disease, with depression alone predicted to be the largest health problem globally by the year 2020 (Murray & Lopez 1996).

In 1999, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care released a National Action Plan for Mental Health Promotion. This document challenged 'everyone, within and across all sectors to work together to provide quality services, programs and initiatives that involve a spectrum of interventions to reduce mental ill-health and to improve wellbeing' (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care 1999).



## VicHealth's Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002

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As part of its contribution to this challenge, VicHealth developed its Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002 which established a framework for the development of program, research and evaluation activity.

This Plan represents a significant investment in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing. While recognising the importance of early intervention, treatment and rehabilitation services, the focus of VicHealth's Plan is on changing social, economic and physical environments so they improve health for all Victorians and on strengthening the understanding and skills of individuals in ways that support their efforts to achieve and maintain their mental health.

Taking an intersectoral, partnership approach, the Plan was developed with input from academics, policy-makers and field practitioners from the sports, arts, education, community, health, legal and business sectors as well as governments at national, state and local levels. The process of developing the Plan involved:

- a review of current literature and an analysis of policy;
- mapping of national and state activity in mental health promotion;
- development of a mental health promotion framework to guide innovations; and
- consultation with over 100 organisations, key stakeholders, policy-makers and funding bodies.

While recognising that a long-term investment would be required to achieve real gains in mental health promotion, the Plan proposed a range of activities to be implemented initially over a three-year period (1999–2002), including:

- the purchasing and commissioning of programs and projects that involve the strengthening and extension of existing programs;
- development of new projects and research activity across sectors;
- brokerage to ensure that innovative and collaborative funding models are created and to provide opportunities for business and governments to invest in relevant activities in the Plan;
- advocacy to ensure that mental health promotion initiatives are undertaken at community and organisational levels and by government; and
- evaluation to document and disseminate lessons learned.

## A conceptual framework

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

As part of the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002, VicHealth developed a conceptual framework to guide planning and implementation. This framework identifies strategies and processes to address key determinants of mental health. It also outlines specific outcomes to guide the evaluation both of the Plan itself and funded programs. The framework, discussed in detail below, is summarised in figure 1 (see inside front cover).

### Defining mental health

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

### Mental health promotion: VicHealth's approach

The approach to mental health promotion adopted in the Plan is one which aims to achieve better mental health and wellbeing across populations by:

- focusing on improving the social, physical and economic environments that determine the mental health of populations and individuals;
- focusing on enhancing protective factors such as coping capacity, resilience and connectedness of individuals and communities in order to improve emotional and social wellbeing;
- taking a whole-of-population approach, although interventions may focus on specific population groups; and
- measuring outcomes in terms of public policy, organisational practices and organisation of social factors.



## Determinants of mental health and priority themes for action

A number of factors influence a person's mental health and wellbeing, among them individual attributes such as heredity, luck, knowledge, attitude and skills. However, there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that social, economic and environmental conditions also play an important role.

In particular, VicHealth identified the following three determinants as the priority themes for its Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002:

**Social connectedness**, including:

- social and community connectedness
- stable and supportive environments
- a variety of social and physical activities
- access to networks and supportive relationships
- a valued social position

**Freedom from discrimination and violence**, including:

- physical security
- opportunity for self-determination and control of one's life

**Economic participation**, including:

- access to work and meaningful engagement
- access to education
- access to adequate housing
- access to money

*The link between discrimination and mental ill-health is well established, with exposure to discrimination increasing the risk of lowered self-esteem, social isolation, depression, anxiety, drug use and suicidal feelings (University of Surrey 1998).*

### **Theme one: Social connectedness**

Social connectedness involves having someone to talk to, someone to trust, someone to depend on and someone who knows you well (Glover et al. 1998). An individual's level of social integration and social support are powerful predictors not only of their mental health status but also of morbidity and mortality (AHMAC Working Group 1997; Brunner 1997). For example, young people with poor social connectedness are two to three times more likely to experience depressive symptoms when compared with peers who report the availability of confiding relationships (Glover et al. 1998). In recognition of the link between social connection and mental health, the Plan focuses on strategies to increase connections between individuals and communities.

### **Theme two: Valuing diversity and working against discrimination**

The link between discrimination and mental ill-health is well established, with exposure to discrimination increasing the risk of lowered self-esteem, social isolation, depression, anxiety, drug use and suicidal feelings (University of Surrey 1998). For example, higher suicide rates among Indigenous and same sex attracted young people have been attributed in part to discrimination on the grounds of race and sexual preference respectively (Department of Health and Family Services 1997; National Children's and Youth Law Centre 1998). Young people who are victimised are three times more likely to be at risk of having depressive symptoms when compared to those not reporting such experiences (Glover et al. 1998). Gender related discrimination and violence have been identified as factors contributing to mental health problems in women, among them excessive use of psychotropic medication and eating disorders (Raphael in Sorger 1995).

Victoria has a diverse community with some individuals and communities experiencing less favourable treatment than others. Accordingly, this aspect of the Plan focuses on strategies that address racial discrimination, homophobia and ageism.

### **Theme three: Economic participation**

Economic participation involves having access to employment as well as to the money necessary to feed, clothe and participate fully in community life. A growing body of evidence links poor mental health with limited access to important resources such as income, employment and education (Wilkinson & Marmot 1998). Unemployed people, for instance, experience higher levels of depression, anxiety and distress and lower self-esteem than their counterparts who are employed (McLelland & Scotton 1998). People living in areas with greatest inequalities in income are 30% more likely to report their health, including their mental health, as fair or poor compared with those living in areas with the smallest inequalities in income (Kennedy et al. 1998).



There is also some evidence to suggest that economic and social inequality can undermine broader social cohesion, thus negatively impacting on social connectedness and community safety (Wilkinson 1997).

For these reasons, the Plan focuses on strategies to enhance people's access to economic resources such as education, employment and income.

## Health promotion action

Traditionally, health promotion practice has focused on behaviour modification and social marketing strategies to assist individuals to combat unhealthy conditions. While the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002 recognises the importance of these strategies, it complements them with interventions to combat unhealthy conditions at their source. The Plan proposes, therefore, that a range of strategies be supported, including:

- research
- workforce development
- participation pilots
- community strengthening
- organisational development
- advocacy for legislative and policy reform
- communication and social marketing

## Target population groups

A person's location in the broader social and economic structure, both as an individual and as a member of a particular population group, has a profound influence on their mental health. In general, those groups which have good access to social and economic resources have better mental health and lower rates of mental health problems than those whose access is limited (Power et al. 1997).

Various programs of the Plan target particular population groups.

The CAP Scheme targets:

- people living in rural and regional Victoria
- people who are socially and economically disadvantaged
- young people

*The Plan is based on the understanding that successful action to promote mental health and prevent mental ill-health can only be achieved and sustained with the involvement and support of the whole community and the development of collaborative partnerships across sectors. This includes those in public, private and non-government organisations, both within the health sector and in other sectors, that influence the way in which people live, are educated and work.*

## Settings for action

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

Accordingly, the Plan identifies a number of settings for action, including the community, workplaces, sporting facilities and education, health and arts organisations.

## Anticipated outcomes

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

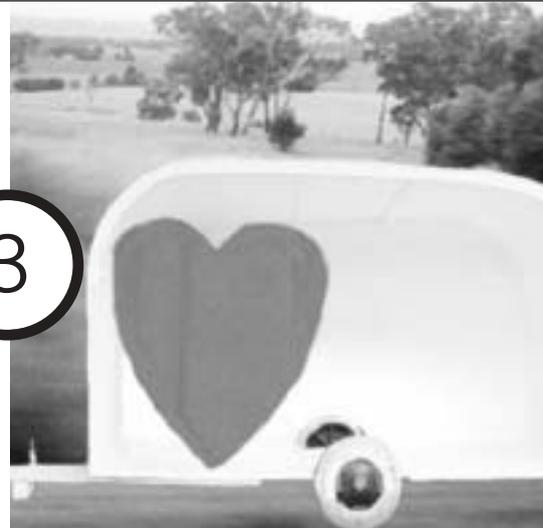
For individuals, the aim is to improve health knowledge and awareness of, and capacity to access, services. At the community level, the aim is to foster environments which are safe and supportive and which offer accessible and appropriate opportunities for participation in community life. To achieve organisational aims, policies and programs which promote mental health must be developed and organisational partnerships, both within and outside the health sector, built. Partnerships contribute to health promotion capacity by engaging a broader base of skills, expertise and resources as well as wider constituencies in the mental health promotion endeavour.

Accordingly, the activities in the Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002 have a focus on building individual, community and organisational capacity to promote mental health. In particular, the ability to establish effective and durable partnerships is a key priority for all schemes and projects initiated under the Plan.

The evaluation of the Plan and of individual schemes focuses on the extent to which these outcomes have been achieved and on improving knowledge about effective strategies and processes for building health promotion capacity at the individual, community and organisational levels.

# COMMUNITY ARTS PARTICIPATION

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## Why invest in the arts?

Research indicates that communities with high rates of participation by individuals in community activities have better health outcomes than those with low levels of civic engagement (Marmot 1999).

Research specific to the arts emerging from the UK, USA, Canada and Australia indicates that participation and involvement in creative activity can contribute to better health and stronger communities and that there is a strong correlation between the health of individuals and that of their community.

Through involvement in arts activity participants have developed supportive social networks and reported increased feelings of wellbeing (Jermyn 2001; Matarasso 1997). Participants can discover and develop skills, increase their self-esteem, build social networks and improve the sense of control over their lives. In the case of young people, research also suggests that involvement in creative activity can result in improved academic achievement and school retention rates, and reduced drug and alcohol consumption and juvenile offending (Heath & Soep 1998; University of Pennsylvania 2001).

The research also indicates that community based arts activity can make a considerable contribution to community health, development and renewal (Williams 1997). Through collaborative and inclusive processes, social cohesion and a sense of belonging are fostered and issues of community importance can be discussed and explored in creative ways.



*'Xena Ponders Blue' series. Artwork: Adam. Nature vs Culture Project.*



## The Community Arts Participation Scheme

The CAP Scheme supports approximately 40 community arts projects each year. Projects in this evaluation applied for funding of up to \$25,000 per annum or \$50,000 over two years.

VicHealth defines community arts projects as those including a range of activities involving communities participating in the creation and execution of arts projects that are guided by professional artists. Through collaborative and inclusive processes, community arts projects enable people to creatively express ideas about themselves and their communities in ways which celebrate and reflect their experience and identity.

### **The key aims of the CAP Scheme are to :**

- achieve participation in creative activity for people living in rural Victoria, those who are socially or economically disadvantaged and young people;
- facilitate community development and contribute to sustainable community cultural activity;
- encourage partnerships between arts and non-arts organisations; and
- identify models of good practice in health promotion within the arts setting.

*Through collaborative and inclusive processes, community arts projects enable people to creatively express ideas about themselves and their communities in ways which celebrate and reflect their experience and identity.*



## Evaluation methodology

*Collectively, these projects involved over 1000 participants. In addition, the outcome of each project was viewed by large audiences. Projects were spread across Victoria and ranged in size from 20 to over 100 participants.*

### Aims

The evaluation of the first projects funded through the VicHealth CAP Scheme was conducted during the period January 2001 to June 2002. The aims of the evaluation were to identify whether projects achieved the Scheme's aims – either individually or collectively – and to consider the extent to which the Scheme contributed to the strategic aims of VicHealth as an organisation, particularly in relation to mental health promotion.

### Methodology

#### Type of evaluation

The evaluation was conducted as a formative evaluation. Twenty-eight of the 40 funded projects participated in the evaluation.

#### Projects involved

Projects evaluated covered a range of:

- geographical locations, including rural, regional and metropolitan areas;
- sizes;
- timelines;
- activities and art forms; and
- lead agencies and types of partnerships.

Collectively, these projects involved over 1000 participants. In addition, the outcome of each project was viewed by large audiences. Projects were spread across Victoria and ranged in size from 20 to over 100 participants. Timelines varied from 12 weeks to two years and art forms ranged from theatre to music to visual arts and combined art forms. Half of the projects were managed by arts organisations; the rest were managed by health or welfare organisations, local government organisations, community groups/centres, and an advocacy and membership organisation.

#### Data Collection

Information was collected through:

- a project survey, which was completed by an appropriate staff member (usually the project officer) at the beginning and end of the project and, for projects over six months, a third survey mid-way through the project. The survey could be completed electronically or on hard copy;
- focus group discussions at cluster meetings held quarterly;
- internal evaluation reports; and
- press clippings, photos and any other relevant material.



Cluster meetings to bring together all the projects in the evaluation were held quarterly. These were well-attended and often included creative team members as well as project officers.

Ten projects were investigated in greater depth as case studies. Information for the case study projects was collected through:

- a project diary completed by the most appropriate people within the project;
- interviews and focus groups with participants, creative staff, project staff and relevant key informants;
- a participant survey, when appropriate;
- observations of rehearsals/project work and performances and public events;
- discussions with members of audiences; and
- regular telephone/email contacts.

A minimum of one site visit was made to the case study projects; two or three visits were made in many cases.

### **Strengths of the methodology**

Conducting the evaluation using a formative methodology has allowed VicHealth to:

- consider learnings as they are identified;
- modify or revise their own management practices; and
- model a management style which supports a culture of continuous improvement.

The conduct of the cluster meetings was a significant strength of the methodology. Cluster meetings not only provided a forum to conduct focus groups with practitioners but, probably more importantly, also provided a peer network for community arts practitioners. Through the cluster meetings project issues and problems were raised and resolved, practitioners suggested alternative approaches which were adopted, and referrals were made to artists, health practitioners and the welfare sector. Participants also shared knowledge of new funding opportunities to enhance sustainability and new projects were conceived. Participants at each new funding round spontaneously observed that the cluster meetings were an extremely valuable peer and professional support network.

Engaging under-resourced, over-stretched practitioners in research was a difficulty. There are gaps from a number of organisations; however, the overall compliance is actually a strength rather than a limitation given the sector's challenges. Many more positive observations than negative were made about the evaluation. The purpose of the evaluation was consistently explained and opportunities for verbal as well as written feedback were provided.

*The conduct of the cluster meetings was a significant strength of the methodology.*

### Limitations of the methodology

Research into the links between art and health is fraught with methodological limitations. The principal limitation is determining the cause and effect of participation in community arts projects. It is extremely difficult to prove beyond doubt that outcomes – positive or negative – are the result of participating in the project.

The use of control groups is a standard technique in research. There are ethical considerations in such an approach in the community arts field, however, even though they could be set up for some projects. Also, as it is likely that numbers of participants/projects would be too low to provide definitive answers, however, the method would still be questionable. Critiques also raise the need for longitudinal research to determine long-term outcomes. However, the primary aim of the Scheme is participation, predicated on the knowledge that participation itself is a protective factor leading to health benefits.

Other challenges in conducting the evaluation included:

- The outcomes of the 28 projects varied considerably.
- There was difficulty in isolating the project outcomes that were directly related to the VicHealth funding as project and infrastructure funding was also often derived from other sources. The VicHealth component was often comparatively small.
- The variety of projects made it very difficult to isolate any single characteristic – such as organisation type, project type, staff involved, participants – from which to derive conclusions.
- There was a reliance on self-reports, small samples and qualitative data. This was balanced by interviews with key informants to corroborate claims and reference to external sources, such as newspaper reviews and attendance figures.
- The participant survey results were of limited value, for a number of reasons. Some people ticked all boxes indiscriminately or had difficulty completing a written questionnaire. After identifying this, the survey was used as a tool to confirm positive experiences of involvement rather than for shedding light on how and why the experience was positive.



# Findings

## Mental health benefits of participation

### Social connectedness

The evaluation found that social connections are facilitated across individuals, groups, families and communities through community arts projects as described below. These connections extend to political, social and environmental contexts.

#### *Developing positive relationships*

The evaluation observed that the group-based nature of all the projects, combined with the supportive facilitation of the community arts workers, resulted in participants developing positive relationships with their peers and the wider community.

The strength of the community arts process is its ability to bring diverse people together around a common project and sense of purpose. People are exposed to and gain a greater understanding of others and potentially a greater sense of social connection by creatively grappling with a central question of importance to the group. Through the process participants, often for the first time, are exposed to professional artists, role models, bureaucratic and political structures, the media and community leaders. Friends and associates are made and their worlds are expanded.

The significance of achieving this level of connection needs to be understood in the context of the priority populations. The majority of CAP projects involve groups of people conventionally isolated from participation – people with intellectual, physical or psychiatric disabilities, long-term unemployed people, young people with drug habits, marginalised young people, people in isolated rural communities. A number of the projects explored the issues that contributed to the participants' social isolation through art.

*The strength of the community arts process is its ability to bring diverse people together around a common project and sense of purpose.*

#### *Developing Positive Relationships*

The Courthouse Youth Theatre's project, Terra Nullius, brought together young people from Geelong, the nearby coastal communities and the local Aboriginal community centre. These young people's lives had never previously crossed and were probably not likely to. Meeting people from unfamiliar backgrounds, cultures, schools, religions and regions was sometimes difficult for participants at the beginning of the project. However, through the experience of collaborating as peers, prejudices were challenged and participants developed new understandings of each other.

#### *Developing Positive Relationships*

*Shimmer*, a theatre project, brought together a cast of women whose ages ranged from 9 to over 30 years. While the project team were concerned that the age range may cause difficulties, the participants appreciated learning from each other. The older women said it 'made them feel young'; the young women and the creative team highlighted the spontaneous mentoring and support provided by the older women. As one project officer observed of the project's participants: 'they have all made friends'. Without the community arts projects, these friendships and connections were unlikely to occur.

***Gaining public recognition***

Participants receive recognition and feedback from a hitherto unknown world through the making of work that receives wide public exposure. The work may be reviewed in the local or state media, featured in major festivals and, in some cases, win awards. This public acknowledgement is an important aspect of connecting individuals to the wider community. Public recognition brings a sense of pride to participants. It allows the general public as well as family and friends to gain an appreciation of the talents of people they may otherwise never encounter and may hold fears and prejudices about. Participants become connected to the mainstream and the mainstream becomes connected to the participants.

***Connecting families***

Participant: *My father doesn't think I'm a loser any more and neither do I.*

The creativity and skills shown by participants in CAP projects often provided families with new insights into their sons, daughters or, in the case of the Performing Older Women's Circus, mothers and grandmothers. One participant reported:

*I am personally delighted that I can now stand on my head unassisted thus increasing my brain power, usefulness and entertainment value to my grandchildren!*

On a more serious note, a project officer reported:

*One mother said that her husband doesn't interact easily with their kids but is very proud of his daughter's work and has taken it to work to stick on the wall.*

In some extreme cases, participants' involvement led to their first contact with their families for years when they invited them to performances or exhibitions. A welfare agency collaborating on a project in country Victoria reported that for some participants their involvement in the project was instrumental in reunifying them with their families. With a constructive and structured activity to work on, the dynamics changed sufficiently within the family to allow the young people to return home.

***Connecting diverse communities***

On a larger scale, *Big West*, based in the western suburbs of Melbourne, brought together diverse community cultural groups to work together on a single community celebration event. This event led to the formation of a new band called the BIG MIX which is a collaboration between African and Vietnamese musicians. This artistic and cultural collaboration is a direct outcome of the project. The BIG MIX is now being engaged by other organisations such as the Richmond Lunar Festival.



Connecting communities was a direct aim of several projects. Both *Express the Music in U (EMU)* and the Next Wave Festival worked with young people in three communities across Victoria, bringing them together for their final performance/celebration. The *Grapevine* project involved bringing together community singing leaders for a series of workshops to develop their skills. The trained facilitators then returned to their communities, spread across the state, to work with their own singing groups. *Framing the Future*, a photographic project based in Hamilton, exhibited both in Hamilton and at RMIT University in Melbourne. The *High Rise* project based in the Carlton high-rise estate inspired the Kensington high-rise estate's involvement in *Rising Higher*.

#### **Connecting with health and welfare organisations**

Most projects reported that through partnerships with health and welfare organisations, or simply through their broader community networks, participants were frequently referred to other services and organisations. Examples included referrals to youth help and support services, family services and employment services. The participants in *A(Maze)*, based in a community health centre, used the metaphor of the maze to explore the challenge for young people of exploring complex community service systems. A key outcome for the *HighWater Theatre Project*, which involved marginalised young people in north-east Victoria, was that:

*Participants are being linked more and more to the wider community and there is evidence of their feeling of 'belonging' in the wider community and of having people who care.*

#### **Enhancing skills**

An aim of many community arts projects is to enhance the skills of participants to assist their ability to function at broader political, social and environmental levels. A number of projects working with marginalised young people reported improved participation at school or return to school. These projects included *Dragons and Angels*, *Chasing the Vampire*, *Circus Tarrangos*, *High Rise*, *HighWater Theatre Project* and *Nature vs Culture*.

Participants from the *HighWater Theatre Project* extended their world into political structures when they were invited to perform in the Great Hall of Parliament House in Canberra. Participants from the *Big hART* project were invited to a closed meeting with the State Housing Minister to discuss issues related to homelessness and participated in a public forum to discuss improving services.

*This evaluation focused on whether, through the CAP Scheme, participants experienced reduced social isolation and increased feelings of connection/belonging.*

*The methodology did not investigate the enduring nature of these connections, whether they influenced further connections or the precise numbers and ranges of connections per participant or project.*

*Hearing the reaction to their personal stories and performance had a huge impact on the young people's understanding of their place in the community.*

### **Valuing diversity and working against discrimination and violence**

*I'm grateful that you shared your stories. Now I have a greater understanding of your lives and the issues you live with.*

Audience member, Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company.

Participation in community arts projects had an impact on individuals' identity and, in turn, the community's perception of them. For many people, their role in the project allowed others to see them differently. This is consistent with the findings of CoMedia's evaluation of the social impact of the arts in the UK (Matarasso 1997). This is particularly important in VicHealth's community arts projects as self-image and community perception of participants in the priority populations is often damaged or precarious. Participants are, often for the first time, appreciated for their talents rather than deficits. A 'homeless person' is recast to an active role of artist, as a contributor to society with something to say and an audience that wants to hear it. In the end, tolerance and understanding is increased from an expanded view of each other.

For example, *Chasing the Vampire* was a theatrical piece created by young people about their issues with substance abuse that was performed for large enthusiastic audiences at Trades Hall. Hearing the reaction to their personal stories and performance had a huge impact on the young people's understanding of their place in the community. *Back to Back Theatre Company* and the *Break of Day Players* both work with people with disabilities and produce works which challenge perceptions of ability and disability.

The arts can also provide a powerful tool for advocacy by creating and enlarging understanding of unfamiliar people and issues. Many projects in the Scheme assumed this role. The *Women's Circus*, for example, produced the critically acclaimed *Secrets*, dealing with the issue of sexual abuse. Participants were survivors of sexual abuse who, through the play, were metaphorically and literally 'given a voice' to talk about a subject often treated as a taboo. The *Performing Older Women's Circus* challenged assumptions about the physical capabilities of older women. *Roomers* was a project created by people living in transitional housing which gave them an opportunity to show their talents in poetry and writing.

As one participant of the *Roomers* project explained:

*People often associate disadvantage with being stupid, with Roomers we get to prove that we're not.*



## Economic participation and meaningful engagement

The focus of the CAP Scheme is on social and community, rather than economic, participation. However, examples of community arts involvement providing a pathway to employment were encountered. A participant from the *Gneetung Tukae* project, for example, was engaged as the artist for the follow-on project. One of the participants in the photographic project *Framing the Future* was taken on as the local football club's official photographer. Many projects, particularly with young people, identified that participation led to them returning to school or undertaking further study. Further longitudinal research would provide interesting results in this area, although there may be difficulties in maintaining contact with project participants.

Participants in a number of projects made the transition from social isolation to meaningful engagement through the project. As a result of their part in the play, performance, exhibition or songwriting they saw themselves differently and could imagine futures with a vastly expanded range of options.

*Participants in a number of projects made the transition from social isolation to meaningful engagement through the project.*

### *Economic participation and meaningful engagement*

The observations of participants who experienced this transition reinforce the mental health benefits of meaningful engagement for individuals and the benefits for the community:

*...it's better than me... sitting at home smoking my food money. I couldn't afford to do this by myself, but now I'm being productive...*

*I actually look forward to getting up. I haven't felt like that since I was eleven years old.*

*People who've given up drugs need to be involved in something important. Staying off and living life is the hard part, but (the studio) has shown me the other side – you can have fun.*

### ***Developing skills***

The key focus of the evaluation in terms of economic participation was identifying the development of marketable skills. Through the project surveys, project officers were asked if participants developed skills in the nationally recognised 'generic skills or competencies considered essential for people to participate effectively in the workforce' (NCVER 2000). These are known in the Australian vocational and educational sector as the Mayer Key Competencies. They are:

- collecting, analysing and organising information;
- communicating ideas and information;
- planning and organising activities;
- working with others and in teams;
- using mathematical ideas and techniques;
- solving problems; and
- using technology.

Twenty-five project officers reported their observations. Skill developments were observed in all areas except 'using mathematical ideas and techniques'. Project officers observed the highest levels of participant skill development in:

- working with others and in teams (reported by all 25 project officers);
- communicating ideas and information (reported by 22 project officers);
- solving problems (reported by 18 project officers); and
- planning and organising activities (reported by 18 project officers).

Developments in relation to the other competencies were:

- using technology (reported by 11 project officers);
- collecting, analysing and organising information (reported by 10 project officers); and
- literacy (reported by 7 project officers).

#### ***Developing skills example***

A project worker with a circus-based project involving secondary age students observed:

*The circus performance required that all participants work together. This was a huge challenge for approximately 20% of the group. There were marked changes in some participants' behaviour and improvement in ability to communicate and cooperate. We lost one participant who was not able to cooperate from the performance group... the school is convinced behaviour of some young people changed.*



Involvement in a theatre project was instrumental in one young woman (previously banned from every school in her area) signing up with the local TAFE. When one of her previous principals, who had expelled her, saw the performance, he was so impressed he sent her flowers.

#### *Developing skills quotes*

Personal development and achievement are an important part of skill development. In many projects, particularly those involving performance, participants are encouraged to overcome fear through a supportive environment, personal courage and commitment.

*Discernible differences in body language can be observed from the first site visit to the public event. Where participants were at first shy, avoided eye contact and were constrained in their abilities to discuss their art, at their public performance they were beaming, direct, articulate and excited. The pride of family and friends is palpable.*

*The improvement in women's self-esteem and body awareness is very apparent. A particular and striking example from this year's performance was of one woman new to...performance, everything, who was given a speaking role in the show. She started rehearsals with a desperate stutter. By the time the show opened, the stutter was gone. It did not reappear during the season.*

Women's Circus

*It was a wonderful experience. It has made me feel really good about myself, my strength, my age, my gender. I have achieved in physical areas, as well as gaining the confidence to perform for the first time in my life. I learned the whole show (!), which was a great boost to someone of my age who hadn't done any 'formal' learning for a while.*

Performing Older Women's Circus participant

*Participants have performed publicly despite fear to the contrary. All are involved in very active drama and voice sessions, which is confronting, but significantly all are involved.*

Somebody's Daughter Theatre

*Perhaps the most powerful skills development is the sense of pride and achievement that the 'fishman' group have experienced. They feel as if they were a part of something important and professional: they were responsible for the outcome and it was all up to them.*

Back To Back Theatre Co.

It is clear that participants aren't particularly drawn to projects in order to develop skills for employment – they want to participate, try new things, have a go, make friends and make art. The skill development appears to be almost incidental, produced by the supportive environment and being engaged in the process. However, it is a key achievement of the Scheme. By project's end, it is apparent that participants are often more employable than when they started as a result of their increased team work and participation skills, defined by one project officer as moving to 'active participation not passive consumption'.

## Organisational capacity

NSW Health's *Framework for Building Capacity to Improve Health* defines capacity building as:

*the development of sustainable skills, organisational structures, resources and commitment to health improvements in health and other sectors, to prolong and multiply health gains many times over* (Hawe et al 1999).

The capacity of organisations and practitioners to implement and sustain mental health promotion activity through community arts practice must be understood in the context of the diversity of the sector, the organisations, and the practitioners undertaking community arts projects funded by the CAP scheme. Structural issues in the sector include the difficulty of working with short-term contracts, working in organisations that are often small and under-resourced, and the need for permanent staff to undertake multiple roles.

### Implementation of mental health promotion activity

Project officers reported that skills in health promotion were developed through practice, particularly through peer support and development at the cluster meetings. This occurred for both practitioners and organisations. It was particularly marked when:

- the practitioners were new to the field; or
- the strategy was new to the organisation.

#### *Implementation*

The following quotes indicate some of these areas of learning:

*[The project is]...challenging, and a J-shaped learning curve, but indeed, I'm learning so much about project management and working in partnerships.*

Western District Health Service

*The greatest help has been meeting with the other people who have funding...This has been the most valuable part of the VicHealth relationship. I would recommend a formalisation of peer support for first time grant recipients like myself.*

Theatre of Fear & Love

*Structuring the evaluation framework and applying the documentation gathering techniques has been invaluable in planning and implementing key areas of the project. It has also been useful in monitoring the project's progress.*

Community Music Victoria

*Within our community health service there has been a raised awareness and appreciation of health promotion with people who are not necessarily engaged by more traditional methods.*

Bentleigh Bayside Community Health Service



The way practitioners embraced the cluster meetings was one of the unexpected outcomes of the evaluation. Project staff reported that there is really no equivalent peer forum in community arts for debate, discussion and support. Recent research on Canada's art and heritage sector highlights the value of networks within an industry experiencing similar pressures. The following quotation echoes the sentiments of practitioners about the cluster meetings:

*These meetings help us to overcome our isolation, they buoy our hopes, provide us with opportunities to share solutions* (Harvey 2002).

*Degrees of formality of partnerships and collaborations varied considerably.*

### **Strengthening partnerships for health promotion**

The CAP Scheme guidelines required that applicants 'demonstrate that the project is linked to other agencies or individuals to enable possible ongoing development' (VicHealth 2000).

#### **The role of partnerships in mental health promotion**

Collaborative partnerships:

- can help to broaden the resource base and expertise available to a project;
- are a way of fostering intersectoral involvement in mental health promotion;
- can help to increase project impact within participating agencies by bringing a broader range of agencies into the net;
- can contribute to the sustainability of the initiative because there will be a greater number of agencies who understand and are committed to it;
- provide a forum for addressing conflicts that potentially exist between services by bringing them out into the open; and
- lead to a more seamless and coherent service system for members of the community.

Degrees of formality of partnerships and collaborations varied considerably. Some projects were conducted by two equal partners, for example Arts Access and the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, and Wangaratta Arts Council and NESAY. Some collaborations were based on strong, ongoing relationships, for example Back to Back Theatre Company has relationships and networks with the disability services sector, the Courthouse Youth Theatre has ongoing relationships and networks with youth, arts and community organisations. Community Music Victoria created partnerships for the *Express the Music in U* project using established networks. When the project was completed, the partnerships reverted to 'networks' which could be re-ignited if needed. Informal arrangements were generally built on existing relationships from staff in the arts and other agencies.

*Partnerships are further assisted by clear understandings of how the project itself fits with the strategic aims of each partner organisation.*

The ability or success of partnerships in relation to advocacy and fostering of mental health promotion appears to be influenced by the existence of factors such as:

- a previously tested working relationship;
- a shared understanding of, and commitment to, project aims;
- a stake in achieving the project aims;
- a shared and articulated understanding of how the partnership will function, in particular roles and responsibilities, nominated lead agency, how costs will be dealt with, how decisions will be made, how conflicts will be resolved, how participant welfare needs will be supported;
- a clear management plan; and
- the skill set in relation to mental health promotion.

Partnerships are further assisted by clear understandings of how the project itself fits with the strategic aims of each partner organisation. For example, partnerships often successfully enabled the welfare needs of participants to be supported. Given the demographics of the project participants, organisations applying for funding in future should be required to specify how welfare needs will be addressed. This may prompt agencies to include this expertise in their partnerships.

Problems in partnerships were observed during the evaluation. These could generally be attributed to untested relationships and incorrect assumptions. A number of examples were encountered of agencies not able to deliver on the loose agreements made during the application process regarding, for example, the level of involvement or assistance in recruiting participants. Other difficulties were encountered later on in the project, especially in relation to roles and reimbursement for participation of staff.

*Partnerships*

In other instances, organisations experienced issues when they had underestimated the time and effort needed to maintain partnerships. For example:

*We are accustomed to making theatre...Perhaps what we were not ready for... was having to coordinate so many service providers and family members to ensure that people could easily participate in the production.*

*...the project has required a lot of management and has been a learning experience for us as a major youth arts festival engaging with young artists. The sheer number of partners involved makes the project very management heavy, especially given the thorough community cultural development processes in place.*



Partnerships are a component of the Victorian's government's strategy of capacity building. As such, they are encouraged not only by VicHealth, but also by most key funding bodies for community arts, including Arts Victoria, the Department of Human Services and local government. It is an area of emerging importance in the field.

There are many advantages for VicHealth's community arts projects in this policy direction. The links between community arts and health are now beginning to be understood and the role of arts in health promotion, particularly involving otherwise hard-to-reach populations is a specialised, and small, field. Partnerships are required to further develop this work, maximise the skills of both the arts and health sectors, and achieve wide distribution of funding. There is also the opportunity to share resources and increase the potential for activities to be sustained beyond funding periods. While there are obvious advantages to the formation of partnerships they don't just happen, all partners need to invest in the partnership.

Resourcing of partnerships is also an important issue. Funding needs to appropriately cover time spent in partnership development. Equally, there are responsibilities on organisations to consider partnership issues in their project budgets and to plan the effective and efficient use of time and resources in the project.

Troubleshooting is another important issue in relation to partnerships. During the evaluation significant problems arose in two projects. Both required monitoring and intervention. Through responsive actions from VicHealth, problems were resolved; however, it raises the need for contingency planning and possible funds being available. In one instance, a skilled community arts practitioner was engaged to facilitate a resolution to the issues. This was successfully achieved and the project has since developed into a great success story (see *Dragons and Angels* case study).

*The links between community arts and health are now beginning to be understood and the role of arts in health promotion, particularly involving otherwise hard-to-reach populations is a specialised, and small, field.*

## Sustainable models of good practice in community arts activity

Sustainability has been defined as:

*the extent to which health promotion practice and policy becomes routine and part of everyday culture and norms of an organisation and the extent to which programs are maintained over time* (Glasgow et al. 1999, p. 22).

### Conditions for sustainability

At the program level, the evaluation suggests that sustainable activity is achieved when the activity is:

- located within a sustained program;
- embedded within the organisation's strategic goals;
- enhanced by strong partnerships; and
- recognised by the community.

*Community arts workers also identify 'quality' – both of the creative process and the creative outcomes – as important conditions required to sustain community based cultural activity.*

It appears uncommon for all these conditions to be met, however. Arts organisations continue their activities and partnerships but invest considerable resources in patching together a range of funds to do so. Arts projects based within health organisations appear more difficult to sustain, despite assessing the projects as successful health promotion activities.

Community arts workers also identify 'quality' – both of the creative process and the creative outcomes – as an important condition required to sustain community based cultural activity. This view is supported by the literature, as well as intuitively making sense – if the experience is not satisfying for participants, there is no compelling reason to continue a voluntary, extracurricular activity.

Organisations addressed quality in a range of ways – using established and skilled practitioners, ensuring quality of the experience for the participants rather than 'quantity' of participants, skilling participants to act as mentors to new participants, respecting participants, and making sure the experience was fun and challenging. Similarly, participants' pride in the artistic outcomes was integral to their enjoyment and satisfaction, and often the most significant factor for their continuation. Scott Rankin, artistic director of Big hART, emphasises the importance of this as crucial to its lasting impact.

*If you make something that is exquisitely beautiful and has its own power, it opens doors. So the person making the work and experiencing the issue, influences the way the issue will be dealt with in the future.*

Weekend Australian 1/2/2003

The specialised skills required in the arts and health nexus are also important to sustainability. As a social worker involved in one of the projects observed, support levels for marginalised young people are significant:

*The additional support, both emotional and practical, which marginalised young people need, is a factor in limiting their access to this and other worthwhile projects or activities. My experience working with and counselling homeless young people shows me that many of the young people are depressed to varying degrees and depression is a factor which makes undertaking any new activity more difficult and more challenging.*

The limitations imposed by short-term funding in the community arts sector continue to emerge as a significant theme limiting overall sustainability of activity. In addition, sustainability in an arts and health context also relies on a skill base spanning both fields.



### Health promotion within the arts setting

The evaluation has shown that a wide range of organisations, from welfare organisations to specialist arts agencies, can successfully undertake community arts projects. Within and across projects, models of practice have been developed based on general community development principles and in response to the particular interests and needs of the participants.

Virtually all community arts projects use active participation as the key health promotion strategy rather than transference of knowledge (about health promotion) or health communication. Variations in models are then variations under the 'active participation' strategy.

Difficulties experienced by some projects in relation to recruitment and retention provided valuable lessons for the Scheme. Successful recruitment of participants was found to be more likely when there were clear understandings between a referral agency (such as a youth support agency or a school) and the community arts officers/organisation. Projects involving young people experiencing multiple disadvantages sometimes found retention of participants to be a challenge. The sheer overwhelming demands of the young people's lives – money, housing, drug problems, conflict – often made participation too difficult. The projects must be underpinned by a clear understanding of the roles of all staff and volunteers involved – community artists facilitate the creative process; appropriate health and welfare services respond to participants' particular needs. It also highlighted the need for contingencies in the face of participant turnover, such as over-recruitment at commencement and/or links to multiple referral sources.

Access to transport also arose as a barrier to recruitment and retention, particularly in projects involving young people and those based in rural and regional Victoria. This is not an issue particular to the CAP Scheme; however, increased organisational activity to address this barrier is required.

The evaluation also highlighted the need to address problems in a project expeditiously, as there can be a real danger of damaging participants or communities if problems are not dealt with. Involving VicHealth early and seeking the organisation's assistance was extremely important. They can advise on a range of strategies – from forming partnerships with an appropriate agency to involving an experienced practitioner as a project consultant to map out a way forward.

Working with groups of people, especially young people, in different communities and then connecting them at strategic points within the project (e.g. workshops, launch, public performance) was reported as an effective model for community development and facilitated social connectedness. New technologies may make this process even more viable. Working across generations was another successful method for achieving social connectedness.

*The projects must be underpinned by a clear understanding of the roles of all staff and volunteers involved – community artists facilitate the creative process; appropriate health and welfare services respond to participants' particular needs.*

## Success factors for Community Arts Projects

*Shared commitment to quality and the integrity of the creative process*

### Success Factors

The wide variety of projects suggests that, rather than discussing models of active participation, it is more relevant to determine a range of 'success factors' developed from both the positive and negative experiences across all project types.

These include having:

- project research and planning to identify community interest and engagement;
- project clarity and a shared understanding of the project objectives;
- clarity about roles and boundaries, particularly role(s) of the community artist(s) and of health and welfare staff, and recognition that the community artist is not a welfare worker;
- clearly developed protocols for organisations working together;
- shared commitment to quality and the integrity of the creative process;
- achievable project goals;
- conceptual and development project stages;
- appropriate skills/experience in the project team including:
  - project management/production management skills; and
  - community arts skills including technical, artistic/creative, team and facilitation skills combined with community-based experience;
- understanding of the participant needs by all staff/volunteers;
- an environment supportive of participants and the creative process. For example, one which is:
  - welcoming and comfortable;
  - supports risk taking in art; and
  - supports positive group dynamics;



- appropriate support for participants, such as:
  - links to health and welfare services if needed, arranged before project commencement; and
  - the need for long timelines to allow for engagement and development; and
- a public performance, presentation, expression or exhibition as a means to focus participants on a shared goal.

*Organisational vision and support, particularly for non-arts based organisations*

## Necessary Supports

In addition, the following macro-level supports contribute to the creative outcomes:

- organisational vision and support, particularly for non-arts based organisations;
- funding body vision and support, encouraging openness of communication, ability to deal with difficulties effectively and ability to negotiate revised project objectives if necessary; and
- appropriate funding structure and guidelines to minimise management risks while maintaining artistic risk-taking, such as payments contingent on demonstrating project management capacity.

## Discussion of key issues

*The arts and health intersection promotes partnerships across sectors that do not have a history of working together.*

### Community arts sector

While the Scheme evaluation found involvement in community arts to be an effective mental health promotion strategy, it is repeatedly limited by structural and systemic shortcomings in the community arts sector. Anecdotally, the sector runs on short-term grants, which often need to be sourced from a range of funding bodies, each with their own funding requirements. Community arts organisations report that the sector has experienced these problems for years and a considerable number of reports reinforce this.

As a consequence of short-term funding, organisations cannot develop long-term strategies for human resource management, professional development or community arts activities. Considerable energy is also invested in preparing funding applications. The sentiments expressed through the evaluation echo those of a recent Canadian report:

*Organisations are being maintained – just barely – through the altruism of their staff and short-term government grants which aren't meant to be sustaining. This is not good for the organisation – how on earth can it plan long term? – and it's certainly not good for the people.*

For VicHealth, the key issue is to recognise the pressures in the sector, to maintain realistic expectations of funding recipients and, where possible, to advocate for greater long-term security for the sector in order to deliver more sustainable health promoting outcomes.

The sector is generally supportive of the CAP Scheme, even though most funding is also short-term, because it is perceived to be innovative and provides support for project development and evaluation which progresses practice and advocacy potential with alternate funding sources. In addition, the networking and professional development opportunities provided through the cluster meetings of funded projects are particularly appreciated, as there are few other equivalent forums available to practitioners.

### Arts and health intersection

The CAP Scheme is located in the recently emerging community based field where arts, health and community development intersect. Very few organisations have expertise in the combined fields or combine these areas in their organisation. While there is a 'community of interest', there is not a recognisable arts and health sector, nor the resources that generally sit with a sector, such as peak bodies for research or to lobby for interests, professional development or peer networking.

The arts and health intersection promotes partnerships across sectors that do not have a history of working together. The partnership approach is clearly in line with government policy across all publicly funded activities. It is important to note, however, that partnerships take time and effort, particularly in building understanding and relationships, and require resourcing.



VicHealth is taking a leadership role with its contribution to arts and health knowledge and skills at state, national and international levels. There is a continued role for VicHealth to:

- promote the benefits and develop clear understandings of creative arts participation to the health sector, general public and governments;
- develop the community/arts sectors' knowledge and understanding of health and health promotion; and
- bring sectors together in project partnerships to explore common interests, such as pathways for projects using creative arts approaches.

*'Facilitating intersectoral cooperation' is one of Victoria's seven guiding principles or core values for health promotion (DHS 2000).*

## Health and health promotion

While the sectors involved in the CAP Scheme embrace the requirement to develop a health promotion focus, the underpinning expertise in relation to health promotion may be lacking. This is an area where VicHealth could provide further training/development. This is particularly important for skilling practitioners to evaluate and effectively document the health benefits of participation in community arts activities.

## Strategic issues for VicHealth

'Facilitating intersectoral cooperation' is one of Victoria's seven guiding principles or core values for health promotion (DHS 2000). VicHealth could facilitate intersectoral cooperation at a strategic level to promote the sharing of skills, knowledge and resources and to develop innovative solutions.

VicHealth is not responsible for capital or recurrent funding of organisations; however, the capacity of organisations to deliver on the objectives of the CAP Scheme is affected by these funding issues. There may be opportunities for funding from various bodies (e.g. VicHealth, Arts Victoria, local governments, Department of Human Services, Juvenile Justice, Australia Council) to be pooled. With greater amounts of funding, longer-term projects could be developed, the project activities could be more effectively embedded in local communities, long-term project outcomes could be evaluated, and skills and expertise in arts and health could be developed and retained. Other key stakeholders could be included in discussions, such as CREATE, the industry training board with responsibility for the creative arts and peak welfare bodies who have demonstrated a willingness to take on long-term arts practice as a health strategy.



# CASE STUDIES

The following six projects have been selected to showcase the variety of art forms, population groups, lead organisations, partnerships, timelines and locations of the CAP Scheme projects.

The six case studies are:

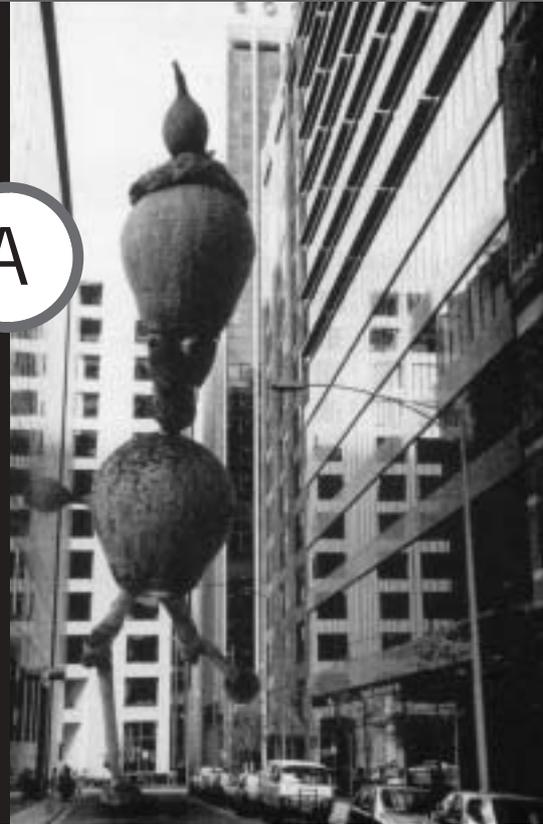
- *Nature vs Culture* – Jesuit Social Services
- *Terra Nullius* – Courthouse Youth Arts Centre
- *High Rise* – Polyglot Puppet Theatre
- *Dragons and Angels* – Wangaratta Arts Council
- *Shimmer* – Platform Youth Theatre
- *A(Maze)* – Bentleigh Bayside Community Health Centre

# NATURE VS CULTURE

*A good community cultural development project will increase participants' sense of connection to community and their sense of opportunity (Thiele & Marsden 2003, p.79).*

Nature vs Culture was a visual arts project undertaken by young people working in an arts studio supported by an artist-in-residence and artistic coordinator. The two-year project had a number of public events, including an exhibition at the Next Wave Festival of works on canvas, collage, sculpture, photography, found objects and performance art. There was also a display of work in a laneway of Melbourne and launch of a film about the project.

A



## Nature vs culture

### **Organisation**

*Connexions, a program of Jesuit Social Services (JSS), Fitzroy, Melbourne. Co-located with other JSS programs and services, including counselling, support, a wilderness program, jobs programs, housing and material aid.*

### **Partners / links to other organisations**

*The project had relationships and collaborations with: RE Ross Trust, the Next Wave Festival, Span Gallery and the Next Wave Festival Public Art Project, Melbourne City Council, Community Cultural Development Department of Public Art and Horti Hall. Connexions receives and gives referrals from and to an extensive range of community agencies.*

### **Project aims**

- Enable marginalised young people to creatively and physically explore their concerns for the physical world.
- Encourage physical and emotional engagement, discussion, creative expression and verbal and artistic debate in order to develop positive solutions and to establish a relationship with the future.
- Build resilience and self-esteem through the development of new skills and participation in productive, creative and meaningful activity.
- Foster connectedness with community, program staff and peers.
- Reduce self-harming behaviour, suicide attempts and dependence on crisis response services.
- Minimise the harm associated with both licit and illicit drugs.
- Utilise the finished art works to educate the broader community about the issues and concerns of marginalised young people.

### **Strategies and activities**

Participants could attend the Connexions studio up to three days a week for up to five hours per day. Artistic staff provided mentoring, discussion, technical advice and support. Regular field trips to contrasting environments allowed individuals and the group to explore the 'nature versus culture' theme and use the experiences to inform their art. Field trip destinations included the Organ Pipes National Park, Montsalvat, Herring Island, the Melbourne Cemetery, various galleries, walks around Melbourne and a camp to Wilson's Promontory. The group processes of planning trips and preparing for exhibitions were important for encouraging a sense of trust and shared commitment to the project.



## Key achievements

- Development of art that allowed participants to engage with broad social issues and contribute to a well received exhibition as part of the Next Wave Festival and subsequent exhibitions in a laneway of Melbourne.
- Building connectedness to the wider community through exhibitions and public works.
- Reducing isolation in the participants through a sense of collaborative purpose and working together.
- Skill development, enabling pathways to further education, housing stability and a greater capacity to manage their own lives in many cases.

*Since coming to the studio, I received much clarity from the mentors involved, as well as discovering new skills and improving existing ones. This has given me confidence within myself, improved my outlook on the future....I'm now looking into this exciting future with wonder and awe and knowing possibilities are endless.*

Project participant

## Key lessons

- Providing a welcoming, secure and safe environment ensures that marginalised young people feel safe and remain committed to the project. This project provided a dedicated studio space. Staff and participants regularly cooked healthy lunches and ate together. This was important for social and nutritional needs. The environment remained stable and secure and was often a welcome anchor for participants experiencing crises in their own lives. Clear and consistent ground rules about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours (e.g. no drug-taking on site) and the consequences of the behaviours provided security for participants.
- Marginalised young people inevitably experience crises or problems. The project addressed this through: the long timelines (two years); oversubscription of participants at project commencement; using a project diary to communicate, particularly with absent group members; a non-judgemental approach; varying activities – from important field trips to regular studio days; allowing participants time and space if they needed a break; maintaining contact with absent members to check on their welfare; supporting participants on their return to the project; and making referrals to support services if needed.
- Rather than *teaching* participants about respect and commitment, participants should be allowed to *experience* respect and commitment. This project required participants to commit to the process, be persistent, participate in group decisions, argue a case, negotiate agreements, compromise and resolve conflicts, all within a supportive environment. This often contrasted with participants' life experiences. Through this approach participants developed communication skills, respect for the process, respect for the work required for the exhibition and a greater sense of pride because of the hard work invested along the way.

## Target group

*Young people with complex health risk behaviours including mental illnesses such as depression, substance abuse and offending. Twenty-two young people were involved with the project. Attendance varied but a core group was regularly present. Fluctuations in attendance often related to issues such as homelessness, unstable housing, drug taking, medication issues, psychotic episodes, involvement with the justice system and family issues.*

*They find your strengths before your weaknesses.*  
Participant

- The focus should be on the quality and integrity of the artwork. This provides clarity for participants and staff, encourages participants to produce their best work, allows them to fully experience creative processes and often results in excellent art.
- It is important to know the participants and their needs. In this project, staff were aware of potential difficult events for participants such as exhibitions or field trips. A careful balance is required between challenging participants and not applying extra pressure to a stressed life.

*Artist practitioners working with fragile or socially isolated participants over extended periods of time will recognize that confidence is not developed in an instant. Nevertheless, a moment of high self-esteem (successful exhibition) can be stored in the memory of both the artist practitioner and the participant and be drawn upon at moments of insecurity (Thiele & Marsden 2003, p. 78).*

- Participating in the project through to the public exhibition can often be the young person's first genuine experience of a sense of achievement – this alone can be life transforming:

*They find your strengths before your weaknesses.*  
Participant

- Encouraging group members to achieve and move on to education or other structures at the appropriate time provides courage and inspiration for others in the group.
- Including the project within a long-term program provides participants with choices to continue or move on.
- Locating an arts program in a welfare-based agency that provides health promoting services, including job skills programs, recreational programs, counselling and advocacy, ensures that the artistic work is distinct from counselling and support.
- With the 'one stop approach':

*[the studio] doesn't need to be a therapeutic space – it can be an arts studio – with only a couple of steps to go to get support.*  
Case manager.

This project affirms this approach as a health-promoting strategy, particularly for working with marginalised young people.

# TERRA NULLIUS

*Terra Nullius* is a subtle constantly moving feast of jokes, provocative images, ideas and action which act as a metaphor for a world spinning out of control. The story is told through a high-octane mix of hip hop dance, multi-media projections and an original live music sound track (*Terra Nullius* program).

Terra Nullius is a multimedia dance theatre performance project created, devised and performed by Geelong, Peninsula and Surf Coast youth using aspects of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in conjunction with stories based on the life experiences of the young people.

B



## Terra Nullius

### Organisation

*The Courthouse Youth Arts Centre, Geelong.*

### Partners / links to other organisations

*Project funding from VicHealth and Regional Arts Fund (Arts Victoria).*

*Relationships/collaborations with: Geelong Performing Arts Centre, North Geelong Secondary College, Matthew Flinders Girls Secondary College, Geelong High School, Norlane Secondary College, Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative, City of Greater Geelong, Arena Production Services, BAYSA, Clockwork Young People's Health Service, Corporate Initiatives, Smart Movies, Bri-ter Printing*

### Project aims

- Use Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a vehicle for exploring issues of relevance to the young people.
- Further increase access to, participation in and appreciation of the arts within young people's communities and provide a multicultural environment for creativity.
- Continue the development of an ongoing youth theatre presence in the Geelong region.

### Strategies and activities

The creative development phase commenced with outreach workshops at three local secondary schools and at the Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative. More than 50 participants came to the first workshop at the Courthouse; this stabilised to a cast of 33. The Courthouse is committed to a 'no auditioning' policy, so those who made the commitment were written into the play. Cast members' preferences for type/size of role were accommodated as far as possible.

The Courthouse develops young people's theatre-making and artistic skills through active participation in all aspects of the production. Young people, working collaboratively with professional artists, wrote the play. Others were involved in a writing advisory group. Some participants were involved in the creative team. Acting, writing and production roles were available to other cast members. After an eight-week rehearsal period, there were six performances.

### Key achievements

- Collaborative script development by the cast of 33 young people working with professional artists.
- Presentation of six sold-out performances at the Courthouse Youth Theatre to a total audience of 500.
- Formation of a partnership with the Wathaurong Education Centre to assist the participation of Indigenous young people in *Terra Nullius* and the ongoing work of the Courthouse Youth Arts Theatre.
- Continued arts involvement for most of the 33 cast members: 16 worked on the Courthouse's next major production (*Signatures*), including six young people from Wathaurong who participated in the writing advisory group; three continued in other Courthouse projects and approximately 10 were involved in other school and community based artistic productions.
- Bringing together participants from a range of local schools and from the Aboriginal cooperative to collaborate for the first time and to achieve critical success with the venture.



- Significantly influencing one of the local secondary schools which was impressed with the Courthouse's collaborative approach. The school's drama teacher co-wrote a play with a student who had been in *Terra Nullius*. The play received a writer's award from the Geelong Performing Arts Centre and the school won the major award for artistic excellence.

*This provides Aboriginal young people the opportunity to achieve – a lot think there is nothing but unemployment after school. Without this, they wouldn't be finding their talents, they would just be involved in activities.*

Chairperson, Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative

*A lot of the young people involved would normally quit if something got too hard for them. Some don't know how to succeed. But, they stayed with Terra Nullius and finished something. They realised what teamwork and commitment really mean.*

*The involvement has been fantastic – they were allowed to contribute and felt valued because of their contribution...it's given them a real sense of direction.*

Drama teacher, local secondary college

### **Target group**

*Young people in the local area, specifically disadvantaged young people. Participants were recruited through local youth networks and the Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative youth group. The final cast comprised 33 young people, including five young people from the Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative youth group.*

## Key lessons

- Holding outreach workshops at local organisations is a successful strategy for recruiting participants and addressing social isolation and access issues, especially in regional Victoria.
- Maintaining effective links and networks with the wider youth and community services network is critical to sustaining community and cultural development activity. Clockwork, a youth health service, is co-located in the Courthouse building. The Courthouse regularly attends BATFORCE, the peak youth body for the Geelong region. These close links provide multiple benefits to the community as identified youth, health and community issues can inform creative and cultural development projects; services can cross-promote the work of network members; and the network can advocate for youth/health issues from a broad platform.
- Providing a range of pathways for young people in the arts contributes to sustaining community-based cultural work. The Courthouse is increasingly significant for youth arts in the region as there is no tertiary performing arts course available. To ensure that there are opportunities for young people to participate in the arts, the Courthouse provides a range of opportunities including *TechHeads*, a community employment initiative; *HeadSpin*, a mentorship program for young emerging artists; and support for the local *Freeza* committee which manages drug and alcohol free music events for young people.

- Professional relationships and effective communication channels need to be established between the partner organisations. The partnership between the Courthouse Youth Theatre and the Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative was a key outcome of this project. Courthouse approached the Cooperative to ascertain their interest. A youth group was just starting up and this was considered a positive and suitable activity. The youth group's worker took on the role of coordinating participants and providing a point of contact. This support and consistency was considered critical in developing the relationship.
- Both partners need to actively commit to the partnership. Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative provided extensive support to the partnership. In addition to the resources of the youth worker, the Cooperative's support included driving young people to and from rehearsals and performances, attendance by the chairperson at some rehearsals, advice on script development and cultural references, and providing the traditional Welcome to Country at opening night. The Courthouse maintained regular communication with Wathaurong and assisted with transport and visited Wathaurong to discuss issues as necessary.
- The partnership needs to provide genuine and culturally relevant opportunities. The Wathaurong Cooperative did not have the resources to support an arts project on its own. Through the partnership, the chairperson observed that:

*Our kids can have the same opportunities as everyone in the community.*

The collaborative way of working was seen as:

*... natural for our kids. Working this way is the same way we used to tell our stories. We don't separate 'the arts' – this is just part of life, part of history...Courthouse works collaboratively with young people – we use the same community-controlled decision-making model.*

Chairperson, Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative

- Mutual benefits sustain the partnership. Wathaurong observed multiple benefits of participating for their young people:

*...the encouragement they receive gives them the power to succeed, skills them up, empowers them to be part of the wider world.*

Within a community that experiences some of the worst health outcomes in the State, the importance of this cannot be overstated. For the Courthouse, the partnership supported the organisation's strategic and community development aims, bringing together diverse young people to work and learn together on a community theatre project.

# HIGH RISE

High Rise is a puppetry and performance project, based in the Carlton High Rise Housing Estate and the on-site Carlton South Primary School. The flats sit within an increasingly affluent area yet many residents face a range of social and economic disadvantages and prejudices. Ninety per cent of children at the school come from a non-English-speaking background and there is a high rate of unemployment amongst residents. The project culminated in a large-scale performance where the grounds of the estate became the theatre and the 12-storey buildings were props for projection and display. A team worked with the students and residents of the estate, supported by a range of community volunteers involved with music and production.

C



### Organisation

*Polyglot Puppet Theatre*

### Partners / other organisations involved

*Multiple links were established to community groups on the estate, relevant community councils, local government, local services and local traders.*

*Significant partnership developed with the Carlton South Primary School*

*Also worked closely with the local mosque and the Islamic Council of Victoria to encourage Muslim residents to become involved in the project.*

*Relationships and links were made with more than 20 organisations and groups.*

### Project aims

- Create a great and unique theatrical production based on the lives of the people who live in the high rise community, working specifically with the children and young people of the community.
- Ensure the processes of the project provide an opportunity for participants to gain confidence in their skill and talent and tell their stories to a wider community to increase understanding.
- Connect the broader community to the Carlton High Rise Estate and to break down some of the fear and negative perceptions about residents and the precinct.

### Strategies and activities

At first, Polyglot found it difficult to find an effective way into the diverse community as no major community arts projects had occurred on the site for a couple of years. Once relationships were established with the primary school, it became the clear conduit to the community. Through the school, Polyglot established relationships with the children, and through the children to their families and their communities.

To start the process, Polyglot performed a puppet show for the whole school. The principal explained that Sue Giles, the artistic director, was:

*close to brilliant...slowly she involved a few kids, and then a few more and a few more, the enthusiasm was built, and then Sue asked who would like to be involved.*

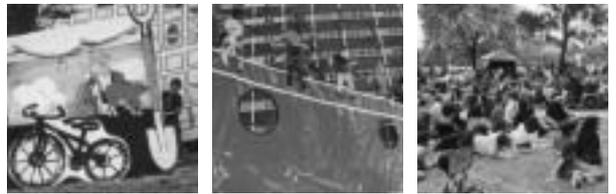
The school's 100 students all became involved. The Polyglot team held workshops over six weeks with students grouped by ages and classes. Other residents from the estate participated, either through their children or community groups. As each new group surfaced, Polyglot made connections through to appropriate community associations.

While the project culminated with two open-air shows, performances of varying scales were held along the way to build confidence, trust and excitement. These included a performance to launch the project held during Housing Week; a school performance and participation in the Fringe Festival parade.

### Key achievements

- The series of public events culminating in the two *High Rise* events, including the project launch as part of Housing Week and the school performance. The performance achieved extensive media coverage, attracted a large audience and was well received by the public.
- Participating in the Fringe Festival parade with a float entitled *From My Window*, and winning the best float award. Through this, neighbours met for the first time and ventured into a neighbouring community.

*It was good seeing other residents out. It was the first time some people had even been to Brunswick Street [a 10 minute walk away].*



- The high level of community involvement with around 200 people involved in the final production – 100 children from the primary school and a further 100 residents. Residents performed as musicians, joined the mechanical team and contributed as part of work for the dole and as group leaders. Through this, people from different cultures were mixing for the first time.

*I've seen Somalian and Eritrean residents in the music workshops. They have a lot to contribute but need the opportunity to be involved.*

- Providing a unifying and positive focus for the largely refugee and Muslim community by strengthening community connections and involvement. Polyglot worked closely with the Islamic Council of Victoria to enable Muslim involvement and timetabled the event to meet Ramadan requirements.
- Spawning ongoing creative activity on the estate.
- The positive impact made on the school community. The principal believes the project:

*has released the kids to express themselves, to develop skills and confidence, and broadened their self image.*

Many of the students experienced multiple disadvantages. Those from a refugee background had lived through some horrendous experiences – war, violent deaths of family members, living in refugee camps for years. The principal observed the creative process contributed to:

- opening opportunities to students confronting problems of language and multiple disadvantage;
- producing positive behavioural changes in the children;
- providing previously aggressive students with the personal resources to resolve problems without violence, using sound negotiation skills;
- assisting student progress in English, the arts and music;
- assisting the development of students' skills in group cooperation, sharing ideas, problem solving, conflict resolution and leadership; and
- enhancing students' pride in the school.

The school's annual report to the Department of Education stated that:

*With the inclusion of the Polyglot Puppet group into the school curriculum, an improvement in English language has been perceived across the school... the opportunities...provided have enhanced and expanded the purpose of language for all students and has stimulated knowledge and understanding.*

- Formalising the relationship between Polyglot and the school. The principal joined the Board of Polyglot to ensure an ongoing relationship at the school and to provide formal links between the company and the education sector.

### Target group

Residents of the Carlton High Rise community, including children from the school based on the estate, their families and other residents

*High levels of participation can be encouraged by ensuring meaningful roles are found for anyone interested in participating.*

- Generating interest from other housing estates for involvement in a remounted project and obtaining funding to achieve this. The work was further developed and performed at North Melbourne Town Hall.

## Key lessons

### The model of community arts participation

- Gaining access to a community with no established structures for community arts requires development of networks with key community groups and developing the appropriate conduit. The local primary school provided the link through to the families and residents of the estate and to other community groups. The high Muslim population at the estate meant it was essential to ensure the support of the Islamic Council of Victoria and the local mosque to get widespread acceptance.
- The process of establishing sound relationships and trust and allowing significant stories to emerge takes time and requires a real on-site presence and a genuine desire to get to know the individuals involved.
- High levels of participation can be encouraged by ensuring meaningful roles are found for anyone interested in participating. The use of puppets and visual images, the integration of music and taping stories in participants' first language and translating into English were important strategies to overcome language barriers and to encourage participation and gain trust.

### Sustainable community arts work

- Successful and relevant projects can provide an impetus for other projects. On the basis of the success and relevance of *High Rise*, Polyglot was approached to produce a similar project with the Kensington High Rise community. Funding was secured and Polyglot worked with the new community, some of the original members, and other new community groups and schools. The new production, *Rising Higher*, was staged at the North Melbourne Town Hall to sell-out shows during the school holidays.
- The arts provides opportunities for young people to develop a range of social, language and artistic skills, with the added benefit of being involved in an exciting and fun project. Working to performance deadlines encourages cooperation, discipline and responsibility. Pride in their work and involvement in the performance overflows to a variety of other aspects of life.
- Working with non-verbal activities, such as puppets, visual images and music, allowed all to participate, including those experiencing multiple disadvantage such as poor English language skills, low socioeconomic status, social isolation and experience of trauma. Language and communication skills can develop through participation if the process and the project are stimulating, exciting, fun and relevant.

# DRAGONS AND ANGELS

The Dragons and Angels project, based in Wangaratta, involved an artistic team – writer, poet and musicians – working with a group of marginalised young people to develop a public performance for the local community. The original concept involved exploring the theme of dragons and angels in young people's lives.

D



**Organisation**

Wangaratta Arts Council

**Partners / other organisations involved**

North East Supported Accommodation for Youth (NESAY)

Relationships with local schools and welfare coordinators

**Project aims**

- Engage youth in arts, culture and community.
- Give the participants sufficient life skills and self-esteem to help them continue to develop as socially connected and creative individuals.

**Strategies and activities**

Participants were recruited from NESAY and other referral sources. They attended a series of weekly workshops facilitated by local community artists supported by youth workers from NESAY. The workshops were designed to develop participants' skills, to engage them in creative activity and to develop a public performance piece.

Participants devised the script for the performance through writing workshops, expanding and developing the original Dragons and Angels concept. As the story developed they made sculptures for the performance. A wire sculpture of a dragon was the main piece for the performance. Participants also attended performance workshops and held some impromptu street performances in preparation for the main performance.

**Key achievements**

- Staging the public performance was a key achievement as the project experienced significant difficulties between the project partners in its development phase (see Key Lessons). The partners seriously considered cancelling the performance; however, it was decided that 'the show must go on' in the interests of the participants, the resources invested and the partners' obligations to VicHealth.
- The 20-minute videorecording made of the public performance and acknowledgement of achievement by the local media increased the sense of pride in what was achieved and enhanced the connection to the wider community.
- Attracting an audience of over 100 people to the public performance, held on the town's riverbank on the winter's solstice and the positive audience reception.
- The pride of the young performers in their work.
- The positive outcomes for participants as a direct result of their participation in the project. These included:
  - reuniting with families;
  - returning to school;
  - improved performance and attendance at school;
  - reduced risk taking and self-harming behaviours;
  - increased confidence and self-esteem, and



- enhanced ability to deal with aggression.

As a welfare and case management organisation with long-term, professional relationships with the clients, NESAY was able to monitor and track participant outcomes. All the factors NESAY monitors to determine levels of risk with young people showed positive outcomes for the participants. Some participants not only reduced the level of risk in their lives but also gained the confidence to join mainstream groups. Other participants maintained their relationship with the project partners and continued to the next project.

- The achievement of profound and positive health and wellbeing outcomes for marginalised young people over a relatively short time and for relatively low levels of resource investment. The core business of NESAY is to provide services for at-risk young people, such as case management, counselling and advocacy. These more conventional strategies and interventions also achieve positive health and wellbeing outcomes for young people but generally over longer timelines and are more resource intensive.
- The establishment of a long-term arts program for young people at risk, based at NESAY. SMARTARTS, as the program is now known, is working with music – participants are writing songs and planning to record a CD. A number of the young people from *Dragons and Angels* are still involved. The program was recently recognised with a VicHealth award for excellence.
- The establishment of an ongoing arts and health partnership by the project organisations, based on the success of the project.
- Community building in a small rural community. An expanded range of options is now available to young people in the community. Prior to the project, the Arts Council and the youth organisation were seen as organisations on either side of a divide – one conservative, one edgy and streetwise. Through the project these barriers have been eradicated.

### **Target group**

*Young people from the local community*

## **Key lessons**

There are significant learnings from this project about implementing a successful community development process. However, the lessons were learnt through the project's near failure.

### **Establishing partnerships, relationships and expectations**

- Partnerships require clear understandings about roles, responsibilities, expectations and costs. This project came perilously close to being abandoned by all partners and losing its funding because of unclear and unrealistic expectations. The Arts Council thought NESAY would refer young people, provide a workspace and supply paid youth workers, but this had not been articulated or negotiated formally with NESAY.

As the CEO explained:

*At the beginning of the project, there was no documentation, no understanding of the duty of care responsibilities we shared with the participants, no appreciation that we had to pay the youth workers.*

The Arts Council's expectations of NESAY were not maliciously motivated. They simply arose from:

- a lack of experience in working with 'at-risk' young people;
  - a lack of understanding of the obligations on the welfare organisation, which include obligations to state and federal funding bodies for clients and staff;
  - a lack of understanding of the way each sector worked. In community arts, although not ideal, it is common practice for staff costs to suffer at the expense of other project costs. It was assumed this would be the case in the welfare sector, but NESAY's funding and duty of care responsibilities meant they could only provide youth workers on paid time.
- Duty of care responsibilities need to be clearly outlined. All organisations managing community arts projects owe a duty of care to participants. These responsibilities are particularly serious with 'at-risk' youth, when issues such as substance abuse or self-harming behaviours may be present.
  - Formal documentation outlining partnership responsibilities provides clarity and helps to avoid disputes. When the relationship was at breaking point, NESAY's CEO presented a list of concerns to the Arts Council and they worked on developing a memorandum of understanding to clarify obligations, responsibilities and costs.

### **Confronting the challenges and developing shared understandings**

- With goodwill and good management, partnership issues can be worked through. In retrospect, it is clear that the Arts Council's reaction to NESAY's concerns was critical. They were immediately acknowledged and meetings were set up to discuss the issues and develop ways forward. VicHealth was involved – again a critical and constructive step. On the advice of VicHealth, a respected community facilitator was engaged to work through issues with the creative team to clarify, agree and document roles. A new coordinator was appointed to manage the project. The project partners set up systems to monitor and manage the project collaboratively, with clear communication back to both partner organisations.

# SHIMMER

*A play that combines classic myth, musical drama and contemporary thought.*

This youth theatre project was inspired by a newspaper statistic that '53% of young women have ambitions to become leading entertainers or high profile actors'. The writer and musical director researched this statistic in the local community, and while the findings were confirmed, they found equally strong desires for relationships and children. Playwright Angela Costi developed two interconnecting stories to explore these themes – an audition process for 'stardom', intertwined with an ancient Greek myth of the Danaids, 50 princesses who are required to kill their bridegrooms on their wedding night in order to keep the 'stardom' of their rank.

The creative team included a professional writer, dramaturg, director, musical director, production manager and lighting staff.

E



# Shimmer

## Organisation

Platform Youth Theatre,  
Darebin City Council, Arts and  
Cultural Planning Branch.

## Partners / other organisations involved

Informal relationships with  
Northcote Uniting Church;  
Decibels, Darebin's Youth  
Music Program; and local  
schools and tertiary  
institutions.

## Project aims

- Increased participation, creativity, community connectedness and community development.
- Increased awareness of issues affecting young people and their aspirations.
- Development of confidence, assertiveness and team building skills.
- Development of performance skills and enhancement of employment opportunities.
- Promotion of leadership and mentoring opportunities through the development of a permanent youth theatre company run and controlled by young people.
- The staging of a fun, entertaining and complex piece of theatre.

## Strategies and activities

The project called for participation through developed networks via the local paper and local schools. In order to build an inclusive and accepting environment, it was decided that everyone who auditioned would be accepted and that if necessary the work would be re-written to accommodate all cast members.

Weekly workshops were held most Sundays from February to June, becoming more frequent closer to production time. The director and musical director made sure the cast did warm-ups and warm-downs, stretches and voice exercises and trained them physically for the demands of performing for seven or eight nights in a row. Healthy and nourishing food was always a feature of rehearsals.

The cast recorded a CD of the play's songs.

## Key achievements

- Seven sell-out performances, plus an extra performance due to the public demand, performed at the Northcote Uniting Church Hall.
- Critical acclaim in daily and local press and ABC radio.

*The Age's* review stated that:

*Without preaching, Shimmer produces a powerful sub-textual criticism of gender roles and sexual stereotypes. It does this miraculously, while also celebrating the collaborative performance skills of 30 young women. It represents the best of community theatre and was a delight to see* (The Age 11/06/01).

- A realisation in participants of the physical and mental benefits of involvement in arts projects:

*The singing is so soothing, like meditation.*

*It energises you for the whole week.*

*I feel tired at the end, but it's a good sort of tired.*



- Participants experienced ‘a valued social position’ critical to social connectedness and good mental health. Participants experienced a real sense of achievement through being involved, with comments such as:

*I feel like I can do anything after this.*

*Shimmer revived my faith in myself.*

*It changed my life forever.*

- Many participants discovered their own talents in singing, acting and movement. As Kelly Auty, the musical director, explained:

*It is empowering to stand up and perform in front of 100 or more people.*

- A sense of pride in what could be achieved in the local area. All the creative staff came from the northern suburbs, just like the participants. Participants thought it was ‘great to foster creative talent in the suburbs’ – high quality original work, produced through a group effort in the working class suburbs of Melbourne.
- Enhancement of Platform Theatre’s reputation for producing quality theatre for young people and its ability to reflect local and contemporary issues. Platform is currently moving to greater independence from the council, and its solid performance in *Shimmer* has been critical in demonstrating its maturity as an organisation.

Platform Youth Theatre provides ongoing opportunities for young people in the northern suburbs. Many cast members were involved in Platform’s subsequent productions, *Walt and The Paradise Plaza* and *Week*.

### **Target group**

*Young women from the local community, including those from culturally diverse backgrounds*

## **Key lessons**

### **A commitment to excellence influences the experience of participation**

- A commitment to excellence in the production of the artwork engenders pride and commitment and challenges participants. The resources invested in the development of *Shimmer* were critical to the high quality and production values achieved. These resources included:
  - researching the original concept in the community;
  - commissioning a well-recognised playwright to develop the script with the community;
  - holding a public play reading to generate community interest; and
  - establishing a waiting list of 30–50 young women interested in being involved.
- Engaging a team of distinguished professionals, recognised as much for their capacity to empower participants as for their creative abilities assured both quality and a transfer of skills.

- High, but realistic, standards should be expected of participants. While all prospective candidates were written into the play, participants had to audition. This ensured they made an informed commitment to the play and the process. Participants were expected to participate in weekly rehearsals for five months. This was particularly challenging for young participants in senior years of high school or at university who had to carefully manage their time to maintain their involvement.

### Developing a supportive group and supportive environments

- A commitment to the quality of the work should not compromise the quality of the relationships in the group. The group comprised 30 women, with ages ranging from 9 to over 30, with most aged 15–20 years. Participants all acknowledged that the group was particularly supportive. They attributed this to:
  - the mentoring of the professional staff;
  - the skilled facilitation of the group; and
  - the mix of ages, backgrounds and levels of experience of the participants.

Facilitators drew out the strengths of each participant and the group process was always as important as the production. For example, one young woman who had just moved over from Perth found it easier to settle into a new city through her involvement. The younger women felt nurtured by the older women; the older women said it:

*made us feel younger. We learnt it's not too late, your dreams can always come true.*

Another summed up the feelings of most when she said:

*Being involved in this gives you something to get away from other pressures, school, crappy little job – here you see everyone and you're part of something bigger than yourself.*

- A supportive environment helps the group development process. Rehearsals for the production were held in the church hall where the play was staged. This ensured that participants became familiar with the space. It also helped develop relationships with the Uniting Church. Preparation of lunch together was an important part of helping the group relax and get to know one another.
- Provision of childcare enables the involvement of women with children. The Council decided the only solution was to fund a childcare worker to provide on-site childcare. An older child was actually written into the play. In their evaluation, Council recognised that more action will also be needed to accommodate participants with disabilities.

# A(MAZE)

A(Maze) was a visual arts project, culminating in an exhibition at Melbourne's Spencer St railway station. The project was managed by the community health service, facilitated by a health worker and an artist. A project committee, with representatives from local youth services and transitional housing, oversaw the project.

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## A(Maze)

### **Organisation**

*Bentleigh Bayside Community Health Service*

### **Partners / other organisations involved**

*Steering Committee included representatives from JPET, youth agencies and youth housing agencies.*

### **Project aims**

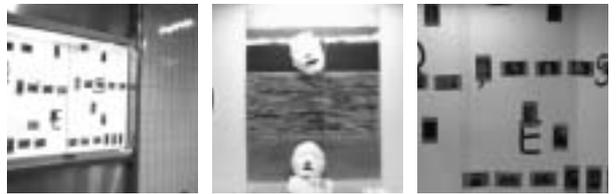
- Provide opportunities for young people to participate in and contribute to artistic activities which are fun and health promoting.
- Encourage and support self-expression, self-awareness and community identity.
- Encourage improved self-esteem.
- Encourage greater awareness and development of community connections.
- Facilitate learning of new skills and improvement of existing skills.
- Improve knowledge of and access to other art and recreation opportunities.
- Increase knowledge of and access to health and other community services.

### **Strategies and activities**

Regular workshops were held with the artist and young people where they worked on production of their folio and exhibition pieces. Participants explored the theme of navigating the service system, using the maze to symbolise this.

### **Key achievements**

- The public exhibition which achieved considerable media coverage.
- Personal achievement for participants, which included:
  - some participants continuing with their art work and enrolling in arts courses, others enrolling in tertiary courses buoyed by their confidence in this project;
  - major changes on a personal level for some participants, including taking control of their lives; moving out of abusive living situations; or making major lifestyle changes such as dealing with anxiety problems, dealing with depression, starting on an exercise regime or giving up smoking; and
  - friendships being established between members of the group. This was particularly significant for some of the more socially isolated participants. Without the project, these connections would not have been made.
- Positive enhancement and development of relationships between the community health service and relevant youth and homeless agencies and workers.
- Positive awareness raising and education for staff at the community health service about working with homeless young people and providing a positive model of innovative health promotion.



## Key lessons

Being based in a community health service, this project provided learnings for the community health sector in particular.

### Working with arts to promote health in a health service

- The arts provides an innovative way of promoting health and community development within a community health service. This project represented the first time the community health service had embarked on an arts project with their clients. It provided an excellent opportunity for community health staff to observe the impact of participation in an arts project on clients' health and wellbeing. The positive outcomes convinced staff of the value of this as a health intervention.
- One of the key advantages of locating the project within the health service was that most participants were accessing other services, such as counselling, thus the impact of participation in the project could be monitored from a health perspective. Improvements in self-esteem could be monitored in terms of social connections, health and medication issues, behaviours, social interaction, level of motivation, living arrangements, ability to cope with challenges and general physical health.
- Locating an arts project within a health service provides a safety net for addressing participant needs. This project targeted "at-risk" young people, most of whom were experiencing extreme social isolation caused through a range of issues including mental health problems and substance abuse. Participating in a group-based arts project was a big step for most. This was successfully managed by:
  - gently encouraging and supporting participants;
  - involving the counsellor, thus providing a familiar and trusted member of staff;
  - maintaining contact with participants;
  - acknowledging the efforts of participants, including the effort of attending the group in many cases;
  - engaging a community artist experienced in working with young people;
  - separating the arts and the health roles; and
  - providing assistance with health and mental health issues through the health service. This included providing referrals to supports such as housing assistance.
- The longer-term relationships with some participants allowed the community health service to support participants in making decisions about their next steps. Through their ongoing relationship, the service could support and encourage participants to follow through with their decisions.

### Target group

*Young people at risk in the local community. Participants could be referred from the health service or other organisations, such as youth support services or transitional housing. Participants experienced disadvantage through a range of factors including mental health issues, depression, social isolation and drug issues.*

### **Learnings for the Community Health Service**

From their own evaluation, the Bentleigh Bayside Community Health Service identified that:

- More than two project staff were needed to effectively resource the group.
- Longer timelines (i.e. longer than six months) would be more beneficial for working with marginalised young people. This would:
  - allow participants to make longer-term connections with the service;
  - provide greater opportunities to develop participants' confidence;
  - provide greater opportunities for the group to develop; and
  - ensure that appropriate referrals and assistance are made for participants at the end of the project.

This is consistent with the views of organisations such as the Connexions program at Jesuit Social Services, which recommends timelines of up to two years to work effectively with marginalised young people.

- Providing certificates of recognition or achievement to participants would acknowledge their participation and skill development and could be useful in applying for courses or employment.

### **Supporting arts, health and the youth sector partnerships**

- More support was needed for the various partnership organisations. The project involved relevant youth agencies, including youth support, employment and youth housing, which oversaw the project through a project steering committee. This approach is consistent with VicHealth's support for community capacity building and developing organisational capacity. However, this involvement was not adequately compensated and relied on the goodwill of staff, becoming an additional responsibility in full workloads. While workers were enthusiastic about the project outcomes and benefits, the lack of formality meant there was not a full understanding of the arts for health strategy within agencies. In the future, more work will be required at the planning stages to develop this understanding and to explore ways to embed this work within agencies.
- Involvement in the cluster meetings held as part of the CAP Scheme evaluation provided the project with resources, information and instant networks. The community health service was able to discuss project issues in a supportive environment at the cluster meetings and importantly make connections with, and seek advice from, experienced community arts facilitators.

## Projects involved in the evaluation

### **The following projects were funded as part of the Community Arts Participation Scheme and were involved in its evaluation**

#### ***Arts Access***

##### *Gneetung Taklae (Well and Healthy Children) Arts Project*

A partnership project between Arts Access and Victorian Aboriginal Health Service to establish artwork in the children's area of the health service involving children and young people working with established Koori artists.

#### ***Auspicious Arts***

##### *Olio*

A community devised performance piece, created by Balance Works, incorporating street theatre, drama, dance and circus performed by members of the Macedon Ranges Shire community.

#### ***Back to Back Theatre***

##### *Fishman*

Summer School and workshop program for disabled people entailing skill development, public performance and a process of self-devised work. The culmination of the work was the performance season of *Fishman* at the Geelong Performing Arts Centre.

#### ***Bentleigh Bayside Community Health Service***

##### *(A)Maze*

A visual arts project based at a Community Health Service, working with young homeless or 'at-risk' youth with the theme of walking through the maze of life. The project culminated in a visual exhibition at Melbourne's Spencer St Railway Station to gain maximum exposure and create awareness in the community of young people's issues. Conducted with the support of local youth and transitional housing services (see case study p 65).

#### ***BIG hART***

##### *kNot @ HOME*

A collaborative film-based project examining the experience of being out of home, bringing together film, rehearsal, public editing and an open-air vigil into a lo-fi performance in a cinematic setting. Conducted in partnership with the Cultural Development Network and City of Melbourne.

#### ***Big West***

##### *Our Backyard*

The project involved local dance and music groups and the community to develop an outdoor performance piece performed as part of the Big West Festival in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The process provided for social connections through meaningful community involvement and a professional artistic outcome. Conducted in partnership with local community arts and cultural specific groups.

**Break of Day Players***Workshop Program*

Break of Day Players is a drama company established for people with disabilities in the Warrnambool area. The company runs a workshop program that culminates in performances in the Awakenings Festival and Warrnambool Wunta Festival.

**Centre for Creative Ministries***Urban Dreaming*

This project worked with a group of Koori men and women involved in drug and alcohol recovery teaching them instrumental, vocal and writing skills. Project participants recorded a CD.

**Circus Oz***Circus Tarrangos*

This project was designed to promote mental health and wellbeing through the Koori Youth Circus. It involved teenagers in workshops culminating in a gala public performance. Circus Tarrangos worked in close partnership with the Northlands Secondary College.

**City of Darebin / Platform Youth Theatre***Shimmer*

Shimmer was developed from the stories of local young women, based around their life and career aspirations. The play involved over 30 young women who had the opportunity to act and sing in the final production. It was conducted with the support of the local Uniting Church (see case study p 61).

**Community Music Victoria***Express the Music in You (EMU)*

The project involved songwriting workshops for 'at risk' youth in three regions (Strathbogie, Frankston, City of Yarra). Each project group recorded their material and the project culminated in a performance at a Melbourne venue, bringing participants from the three projects to perform. Conducted with the support of the local councils of Strathbogie, Frankston, and Yarra, and other church and community groups.

**The Courthouse Youth Arts Centre***Terra Nullius*

Multi-media dance theatre performance project involving Geelong, Peninsula and Surf Coast youth using aspects of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in conjunction with stories based on the life experiences of the young people. The play was performed over a week at the Courthouse Theatre (see case study p 49).

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### ***Elwood St Kilda Neighbourhood Learning Centre***

#### *Roomers Spoken Word Events*

Roomers was designed to give a creative outlet and vehicle for expression for people who live in the rooming houses of the City of Port Phillip. The project involved the mentoring of participants and a workshop program culminating in three spoken word events, performed as part of the Melbourne Writers' Festival.

### ***Grapevine Music***

#### *Leading Singing in the Community*

Twenty singing leaders in different communities were trained in this project to develop singing groups in their own local communities across Victoria.

### ***Ilbijerri Theatre Company***

#### *Community Arts & Education Development*

Development of theatrical arts based projects in Indigenous communities with an aim of stimulating ongoing work in each community.

### ***Jesuit Social Services***

#### *Nature vs Culture*

This visual arts project was undertaken by young people working in an arts studio supported by an artist-in-residence and artistic coordinator. The project culminated in an exhibition at the Next Wave Festival. It was conducted with the support of the R E Ross Trust and others (see case study p 45).

### ***Karen Community Theatre (Footscray Community Arts Centre)***

#### *Australia Karen Youth Project*

This project worked with the young people of the Melbourne Karen community to develop traditional dance and songs into a theatrical performance.

### ***Next Wave Festival***

#### *Re-location*

This community public arts project over three municipalities – two metropolitan and one regional – was based in Ballarat. The resulting large scale sculptural works were exhibited at the Next Wave Festival at Federation Square and then transferred to Ballarat. Key collaborators for the project included arts based programs targeting marginalised youth from Jesuit Social Services and the Salvation Army, Regional Arts Victoria, Here for Life Foundation, the City of Melbourne, the Cultural Development Network, RMIT Public Art Course and Federation Square.

***Performing Older Women's Circus****Changing Pace*

A performing circus encouraging involvement of older women. This project explored the theme of change, both physical and mental in the lives of older women.

***Polyglot Theatre****High Rise*

A puppetry project, based in the Carlton High Rise housing estate and the on-site Carlton South Primary School, working with school students and residents of the estate. The project involved the production of two public, outdoor performances, using puppets constructed over the life of the project, music, projected images and sound recordings. Conducted with the support of local community organisations and groups, councils and local businesses (see case study p 53).

***SANE Australia****The Mayday Hills Project*

This project was based around a psychiatric institution in Beechworth and the relationship of locals and former inpatients. It culminated in an exhibition in a range of mediums including photography, writing and painting and song.

***Somebody's Daughter****The Highwater Theatre Company*

Worked with kids experiencing considerable difficulties in Albury/Wodonga, developing and enhancing their performance skills. The resulting productions were toured to venues and schools around Melbourne. Conducted with the support of the Upper Hume Community Health Service.

***Theatre of Love and Fear****Men's Performance Project*

A theatre project working with young 'at risk' men aged 15-17 years. Affiliated project included accredited training in video as well as development in performance skills. The project work towards development of a public performance, *The Vampire is Chasing*, held at the Trades Hall in Melbourne.

***Wangaratta Arts Council****Dragons and Angels*

Working with marginalised young people from the Wangaratta community, this project aimed to develop personal visions and stories through a series of workshops in sculpture, writing and performance. Participants staged a public performance, held at an outdoor setting by the town's river for the local community. It was conducted in partnership with the North East Supported Accommodation for Youth (see case study p 57).

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**Western District Health Service***Framing the Future*

Documenting of young people's everyday lives and concerns through digital photography and manipulation through photoshop. Participants final work was exhibited at the Hamilton Art Gallery and at RMIT in Melbourne. Conducted with the support of RMIT University, Winda Mara Aboriginal Co-op, The Hamilton Art Gallery and local schools.

**Women's Circus***New Women's Training and Annual Performance*

The Women's Circus is well known for its work and training with community women. This project explored the notion of secrets as a device for examining the issue of sexual abuse. The resulting performance of *Secrets* was performed to both audience and critical acclaim.

**Yarra Valley Community Health Centre***Queens Park*

This project involved the improvement of the local park environment used by young people, particularly skateboarders, through the development of two public arts projects.

**YWCA Victoria***Artreach*

This project created an arts program for marginalised young women in Bendigo based on the Girlstorey model successfully implemented by YWCA in Melbourne.

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