

‘From the teacup: what contribution can the arts make to our communities?’

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***Culture breathes richness and vitality into our lives;
it animates those things which make us human –
meaning-making, identity, belonging***

Bridging Cultural Conflicts, Michelle LeBaron, 2003

My organisation, the Cultural Development Network works to support communities across Victoria to develop vital local cultures. Our area of particular interest within all that is culture are the arts, so we seek to support and encourage opportunities for communities to actively participate in creating their own stories and celebrating their identity through the arts. I am pleased to have been working with this new initiative of Corridor One 4 and to be part of the opportunities for people from the north Geelong area that the group are initiating.

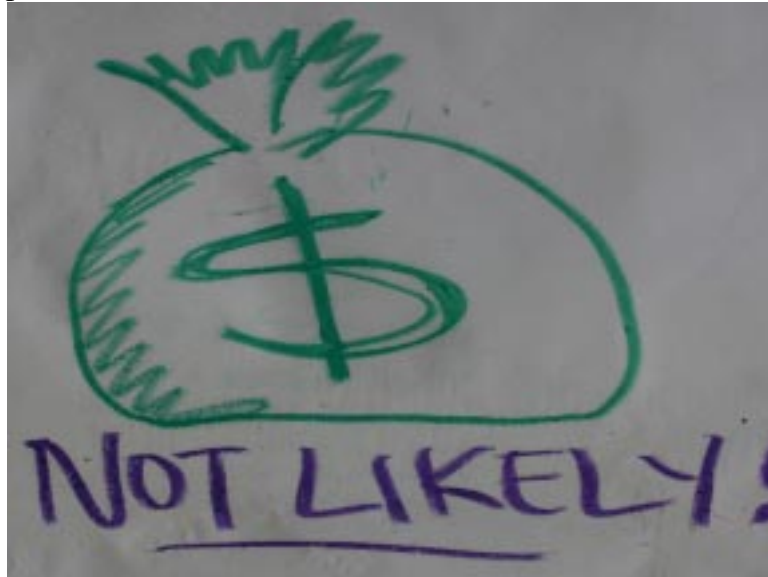
As we have heard today, involvement in art-making can contribute to the health and strength of individuals and communities in many ways. Workers from local organisations have described what they perceive to be outcomes of community based arts initiatives.

- Sue Hartigan from Geelong Arts Alliance described the ‘Insert project’ that was part of the local program of the Commonwealth Games. She spoke about how the very different goals of a major international event and a local arts organisation could be met in the same project. She described the positive responses from Insert participants who enjoyed the great sense of recognition and validation they experienced having their works of art presented on a giant screen to a large public audience, especially as the event it was part of an international event. Another identified positive outcome was the creation of a CD of the artwork, giving it long term possibilities for showing and dissemination.



Art Insert: a community artwork for 2006 Commonwealth Games

- Kathleen Ryan from Gamblers Help gave examples of projects she is involved with; graffiti art on gambling theme created by students at Gordon Institute and a video of stories made by people who are addressing problem gambling in their lives. She spoke about how creating and sharing stories can have positive outcomes including increased addressing of life issues and engagement with services that can assist. These are vital steps on the path to solving gambling problems.



Graffiti art on gambling theme created by students at Gordon Institute

- Lynden Costin from the Courthouse Youth Centre talked about ‘Bursting the Bubble’, a theatre performance created by local young mothers. Participants identified several positive outcomes of this project, including improved community perceptions about the capabilities of young parents as well as improved understanding of the challenges they face. This has led to better relationships with teachers and others at school and a more realistic picture of young parenthood by their peers. The fact that the group has been invited to perform the show in a range of other settings, mostly recently at a health promotion conference in Queensland, increased the young women’s sense of validation and contribution to the wider community.
- Danielle Hughes from Barwon Health spoke about another theatre project that involved young people from the local area. ‘Blame It on Crazy Jane’ was led by Somebody’s Daughter Theatre Company, created with a group of local young people who were not engaged in school or employment. Outcomes for young participants included skill development, valued creative and expressive opportunities, positive engagement with other young people and service providers and in some cases, movement towards related education and training pathways. For some families whose young people participated and parents watched the show, one outcome was better relationships between generations, as parents felt that they better understood their young people’s feelings and experiences.

But do we know that story-telling and other forms of communities based arts actually have the outcomes we seek? Does participation in community arts experience lead to increased skill development and confidence, new ways of addressing life issues, pathways to education and employment, decreased problem gambling or better understanding between people from different communities and life experiences?

My job is to briefly describe some of the research evidence for the benefits of community arts, as well as some of the issues we need to consider in providing quality community arts experience.

Research evidence

The Australia Council says that community cultural development can be a highly effective means for communities to:

- develop new skills and address issues which affect them;
- interact and increase communication and networking;
- address social justice issues;
- represent themselves to their own and to other communities
- and enjoy rich and diverse cultural activities.



Image: from Public Art Public Housing, Moon Lantern Festival, North Richmond Community Health Centre. Photographer: Angela Bailey, Artist: Sue Davies

Value of arts participation: health and well-being

There is evidence that participation in arts is a factor in the development and sustainment of health and well-being. Cultural theorist Jon Hawkes argues for the value of arts participation at a community level:

...active community participation in arts practice is an essential component of a healthy and sustainable society..... arts practice not only open up fantastic vistas of community expressivity but also.... profoundly contributes to the development of community (Hawkes, 2001).

In the UK in 1997, Francois Matarasso made the first large-scale attempt to gather evidence of the social benefits and impacts of participation in the arts. Using rigorous research methods, he identified fifty social impacts on individuals and communities through participation in arts programs. Matarasso concluded that participation in the arts does bring benefits to individuals and communities, with individual benefits such as an increase in confidence, creative and transferable skills and human growth translating into wider social impact, building of confidence of minority groups, promoting contact and contributing to social cohesion. He also considered that many of the social impacts of participatory arts work can be identified and demonstrated,

and that it 'cannot be argued that the arts, and the benefits they return for the public money invested in them, are beyond evaluation other than in aesthetic terms'.

In the landmark US study, *Champions of Change: the impact of the arts on learning*, Fiske (1999) found that the arts provide young people with authentic learning experiences that engage their minds, hearts and bodies. The study documented how involvement in quality arts learning experiences engages young people in ways that other experiences do not, in that they:

- reach young people who were not otherwise being reached
- reach young people in ways that they are not otherwise being reached
- connect young people to themselves and each other
- provide learning opportunities for the adults in the lives of young people
- connect learning experiences to the world of real work



Participants in a Torch Project performance at Eumemerring

Fiske discovered that out of school arts programs for disadvantaged youth were more beneficial in terms of learning and achievement for young people than programs in sport or community involvement.

Deidre Williams describes studies in Australia and the UK that show social and educational outcomes of involvement in community arts programs including;

- building and development of communities
- increase of social capital
- activation of social change
- development of human capital
- improvement of economic performance

There is a large body of evidence that the major residual benefits from community based arts programs come from developing social and human capital, that is, in how these experiences can develop new insights, connections, skills and knowledge which influence changes to people's attitudes and behaviour (Williams, 1996)

So, these are a few examples of the many studies that indicate the possible benefits of community arts for a range of participants in different communities. Given that, what we also need to consider is how we can do the best job of what we do.

Best practice

The Cultural Development Network has been working to develop a 'Charter for Lead Practice' in community cultural development, or community based arts practice. We haven't got to the end of that process yet, but are working in an ongoing way with artists, artworkers and organisations to try and distill what the elements of successful practice are, so we can know how we can do the best job when working with communities.

Copies of our draft paper are available from our website at <http://www.culturaldevelopment.net/publications.htm>. This paper has an extensive reading and reference list- many of which are easily available for downloading. Our website also has extensive reading and reference lists for further information at www.culturaldevelopment.net/resources.htm

The Australia Council, our national leadership and funding organisation has this to say about the qualities and skills of artists we should seek to work with communities. Artists and artworkers involved in community cultural development are highly skilled and adaptable. They require:

- artform expertise to ensure innovative, high quality artistic outcomes;
- project management, planning, negotiation, communication and collaboration skills;
- responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs of the many different communities and understanding of social justice principles;
- the ability to lead, challenge, motivate and facilitate communities in their activities without dominating or directing them

Bill Cleveland, a well-known American writer and researcher about community based arts practice, was a recent guest of the Network, and in February, he presented these qualities of best practice for artists work with communities. Cleveland believes that community based arts practice should be:



If we can consider these principles in our work, we are on the road to doing the best job we can with the communities we care about and work with.

Thankyou

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Some references

Art and Wellbeing, Deborah Mills and Paul Thomas, (2004), Australia Council
Art and Wellbeing assembles ideas and case study material which demonstrate connections between community cultural development and government 'wellbeing' initiatives under seven themes, Health, Ecologically Sustainable Development, Public Housing and Place, Rural Revitalisation, Community Strengthening, Active Citizenship, Social Inclusion and Cultural Diversity.
http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts_resources/publications/art_and_wellbeing/

Beginners Guide to Community Based Arts, Keith Knight & Mat Schwarzman, (2005),
New Village Press, http://www.newvillagepress.net/pub_BegGuideCommunityArts.html

Champions of change: The impacts of the arts on learning, Fiske, E.B. (Ed.). (1999).
Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership.
This report compiles seven major studies that provide new evidence of enhanced learning and achievement when students are involved in a variety of arts experiences. "Champions of Change" was developed with the support of the GE Fund, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Arts Education Partnership, and the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.
<http://aep-arts.org/PDF%20Files/ChampsReport.pdf>

Evaluating Community Arts & Community Well Being: An Evaluation Guide for Community Arts Practitioners, Clare Keating, (2002)
Developed by Arts Victoria, VicHealth, Darebin City Council and the City of Whittlesea, this guide includes worksheets and tools to assist the community arts sector evaluate its work.
http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Content.aspx?topicID=239#cs_650

The fourth pillar of sustainability: culture's essential role in public planning, Hawkes, J (2001)
Cultural Development Network in association with Common Ground Publishing.
www.culturaldevelopment.net

Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts
Kevin F. McCarthy, Elizabeth Heneghan Ondaatje, Laura Zakaras and Arthur Brooks
This new approach offers a more comprehensive view of how the arts create private and public value, underscores the importance of the arts' intrinsic benefits, and links the creation of benefits to arts involvement. <http://www.rand.org/publications/MG/MG218/>

Literature Review: Community Arts Practice
This report reviews the evidence base of the VicHealth Arts for Health Program in the light of existing Australian and international studies on similar programs.
www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/Promoting%20Mental%20Health%20-%20Arts%20Participation%20.pdf

Literature Review Of The Evidence Base For Culture, The Arts And Sport Policy
Janet Ruiz, Social Research, Research and Economic Unit, Scottish Executive Education Department, 2004. <http://www.sportdevelopment.org.uk/evidencebase2004.pdf>

Making Exact Change: How Arts-Based Programs Have Made Significant and Sustained Impact on their Communities, research project on exemplary arts-based programs that have had a significant, sustained positive impact on their communities.
<http://www.lulu.com/can> or download as a free PDF from <http://www.makingexactchange.org>

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***Promoting Mental Health & Wellbeing through Community & Cultural Development:
A Review of Literature focusing on Community Festivals and Celebrations***

This report focuses on the impact of community celebrations on community development, health and wellbeing to determine what further evidence or research is required to build present knowledge in these fields and to provide assistance in developing policy or programs related to community celebrations.

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/PromotingMentalHealthCommunityCelebrationsFestival_s.pdf

Putting people in the picture? The role of the arts in social inclusion

Jo Barraket, Social Policy Working Paper No. 4, February 2005, Melbourne Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne, and the Brotherhood of St Laurence.
www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/barraket_arts_social_inclusion_1.pdf

The Social Impacts Of Participation In The Arts And Cultural Activities

Cultural Ministers Council Statistics Working Group, Australia, 2004

This report investigates the social impacts of participation in the arts and cultural activities. It comes with an annotated bibliography of research in a searchable Excel database.

http://www.dcita.gov.au/swg/publications/social_impacts_final%202.pdf

The Social Impact of Arts Programs: How The Arts Measure Up,

Australian research into social impact, Deidre Williams, 1996

<http://www.artshunter.com.au/communityarts/papers/Commedia.htm>

Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in Arts Programmes,

Francois Matarasso, Comedia, 1997

This influential publication reports on the first stage of Comedia's research into the social impact of the arts. It analyses the social benefits of arts-based projects, from amateur to professional to community work, clearly revealing the important role that the arts can play by drawing on case studies in the UK, Ireland, Finland and New York.

<http://www.creativecommunities.org.uk/essaychunkpdfs/2.5UseorOrnamentWholeText.pdf>