

‘Opening Doors to Young People’: research to gauge their needs and interests
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Case study; Working Outside the Box forum,
presented by the Cultural Development Network, 8th May, 2006

Latrobe City Council Arts Team delivers a range of services and maintains buildings and venues that underpin a lively and dynamic cultural life for the citizens of, and visitors to, Latrobe City. Four key areas proactively work together to deliver these services. These areas are Latrobe Regional Gallery, Latrobe City Performing Arts Program, Latrobe City Venues and Halls and the Arts Innovation Program.

Latrobe Regional Gallery is an international museum standard facility located in Morwell offering a year round program of exhibitions and activities. The gallery reopened to the public in May 2003 after a four and a half million dollar refurbishment, to become one of Victoria’s premier regional galleries. The gallery consists of nine exhibition spaces including a sculpture courtyard and a community gallery that is available for hire. The gallery regularly designs and delivers education programs to both children from preschool to post secondary school as well as providing adult education programs.

Latrobe City Performing Arts Program offers a diverse range of performances including music, theatre and dance presented at the Performing Arts Centre in Traralgon and other venues across Latrobe City. The Performing Arts Centre was reopened in May 2003 following a one million dollar refurbishment of the Latrobe Performing Arts Centre. In 2004 a Performing Arts Education Program was launched which built on existing, and new relationships with professional performing arts, dance and music companies.

Latrobe City also provides a wide range of **venues and halls** that are used by the community for social, cultural and family events as well as some commercial activities.

The **Arts Innovation Program** seeks to strengthen community capacity in the arts by facilitating access to information, networking and skills by which local artists and art groups may expand or consolidate their activities. The program seeks to encourage greater use of Latrobe City cultural facilities and programs by the education sector through the development of links and networks. It also aims to facilitate the establishment of business/arts partnerships that support the dynamic and evolving arts, cultural and intellectual life in Latrobe City and also to strategically link the arts with the tourism sector.

The Latrobe City Council Arts Team strives to place education, in the broadest sense of the word, at the centre of the Team, so that resources are directed at providing, developing and promoting learning opportunities for the broadest possible spectrum of the public. The Arts Team seeks to integrate education and interpretation into every part of our artistic and cultural practice. Reflecting the interpretive nature of exhibitions, programs and performances across the Arts in Latrobe, the education program extends access, mediation and research for the benefit of core and new audiences.

In 2004 Latrobe City Council Arts Team identified a need to engage a full time professional Youth Arts Program Development Coordinator. This need was determined by anecdotal and survey

evidence that young people were not accessing LCC arts programs, meetings with local school principals and a desire to reestablish networks within the education sector after long periods of closure of the two major arts facilities in the city. The overarching goal to ensure that every student within Latrobe City accessed at least one LCC Arts program per year.

The position was designed to provide strategic planning to the regional district schools and youth services providers, in relation to the programming and facilities of all sectors of visual, performing, musical and other arts for youth in the region of Latrobe.

In essence the coordinator was to work across the education sector and youth services providers to identify reciprocal opportunities for the Arts Team within the schools system and across youth services.

The position was also required to facilitate, and where appropriate, deliver; professional development opportunities/training/information sessions to teachers, principals and youth services providers in relation to program delivery and Arts Team services.

Some specific outputs were desired from the Professionals in Residence research

Output one- Develop a strong cultural community for the future by:

1. facilitating the engagement of youth with art at an early age as possible.
2. assisting in developing a culture where students *choose* to attend arts activities outside of school hours – thereby also engaging their families
3. demonstrating the benefits of the creative process.
4. informing youth of arts related training and career opportunities

Output 2- Build new youth audiences by:

1. ensuring every Latrobe City student attends at least one of Latrobe City's Arts facilities every year.
2. introducing every school from Warragul to Bairnsdale to Latrobe City's Arts program. This would take in the four adjacent Local Government areas.

Output 3- Extend regional arts opportunities in targeted arts programming to all schools and youth services and in particular those that are smaller, geographically isolated and stretched for funds by:

1. liaising with principals and/or their delegated representatives and youth service providers to establish wants and needs.
2. strengthening relationships between youth services providers and the arts
3. facilitating programming that meets a range of needs thereby enabling schools and youth services to attend together and achieve the dual benefit of building relationships between students and schools

provide access to exhibitions, shows, educational opportunities at various Latrobe City facilities

Output 4- Tailor arts programs to meet the needs of regional schools to:

1. supplement/compliment existing visual, performing and music arts classes
2. encourage inter-school arts networks by providing programming open to a range of schools at any one time.

3. Encourage the promotion of arts as a teaching aid across the many varied curriculum streams.

Output 5- Build community by:

1. encouraging participation by the broader community at activities/events generated by the program. e.g. shows, exhibitions etc
2. encouraging parents, families and friends to participate in the activities jointly generated by the schools and the Arts program and participated in by the students

Long term outcomes

1. Audience development across youth sector
2. Audience development across families
3. Achievement of equitable access to Arts facilities and programs – geographic, demographic, socio-graphic & psychographic
4. Redress the imbalances in provision of art education delivered externally to schools
5. Linking/networking the education sector more closely with business, tourism and health in relation to the arts
6. Development of an arts education network across Gippsland

A successful application was made to the Arts Victoria Professionals in Residence program and in October 2004 Ariane Ramsay was appointed to the position of Youth Arts Program Development Coordinator. Immediately reportable to the Arts Innovation Facilitator and the Arts Unit Manager, Ariane worked in a close consultative manner with myself as Latrobe Regional Gallery Director, and the Performing Arts and Venues coordinator.

PIR RESEARCH

The aim of the PIR role was primarily to research and document the means of achieving the desired outputs for the Latrobe city arts team. This involved research by:

- consultation with local youth services including support services, schools and peak bodies, conducted using a range of methods (one-one interviews, surveys and group forum.
- an academic survey of leading Arts Ed theories and Models of Youth arts Activity.

The objectives of the research were to:

- establish the local wants & needs of both the youth sector and LVArts (that involved research & consultation)
- strengthen relationships between the arts and youth sectors (through focus groups)
- provide ideas for future opportunities (such as Arts teacher's network, Young Ambassadors)
- make connections across interests and language (the report is a document which addresses the issues, concerns and needs of the Arts & Youth Sector).

Probably the principal focus of my thoughts during this stage were

- to identify the motivation or purpose of the existing and/or desired youth art activities.
- and identify the intersections or the potential for reciprocal opportunities for both the Latrobe City Arts Team and Young People.

The key concerns / motivations regarding the benefits of the creative process & arts engagement that came to light through the consultation process were different for different ages and situation but they fell into two main groupings.

- the arts as a mechanism for: self expression, empowerment and improved life/communication skills
- The arts as a means of increasing innovative thought process and leadership skills.

However it appeared that the emphasis on learning about /or through the arts generally ranks as a lower priority than science, maths and English, for this reason the research into leading modes of thought on the benefits of an engagement with the arts was incredibly useful

There are loads of studies, reviews and surveys showing the benefits of an engagement with the arts. These reports substantiate the ideas we all recognize such as:

- that creative expression plays an important role in developing well balanced socially aware young people – who are intellectually and technically capable of contributing to the society of the future.
- that academic achievement is improved by almost 50% between students who engage with the arts versus those who have little engagement with the arts.
- arts learning methods are ideal in reaching disengaged young people.

“Underpinning all reports and studies on regular versus irregular engagement with the arts is the unrefuted evidence that young people who engage more frequently with the arts are more; motivated, confident, empathetic, tolerant and have more keenly developed thinking and questioning skills¹. All of these qualities are generally agreed to be essential personal and cerebral skills for all young people now and in the future” (1).

The key papers that informed my report were:

¹ Australian Council for Education Research, *Evaluation of School-based Arts Education Programs in Australian Schools* (Bryce et al 2004).

International- UNESCO, nacce *All our futures*, Fiske *Champions of Change*, Friere *Pedagogy of the oppressed*
National (OzCo Arts Education Strategy)
State (Arts Vic, DE&T, DPC)

Predominant themes:

- self expression and empowerment
- academic excellence through the cerebral development associated with original thought or creativity

These two themes were not seen to be mutually exclusive, but they are two separate benefits derived from the arts. The self expression/empowerment concept being the most readily accepted of the two. The ‘Champions of Change’ and ‘The All our Futures’ papers address cultivating young minds specifically for the challenges which are anticipated in the future of western culture. ‘Champions of Change’ is a useful paper because it crunches quantitative data compiled through a ten year study involving 25,000 young people.

Outcomes of PIR

From the consultation a base line survey of Youth engagement with LCC Arts was generated, meaning that an audit of current engagement has been created, for comparison at a later date.

The place and purpose of Latrobe City Arts in the community is better understood.

A mutual awareness of all types of arts activity (and the motivation which fuels the activity) has been facilitated between the Latrobe City Arts and The Youth Sector along with a raised awareness of respective timing & cost constraints.

The methods of Consultation type research was collected and compiled from a variety of:

- survey
- one-on-one interviews
- group forum

Consultation was held with Services run by or for young people and included:

- local branches of state-wide services (such as LLEN)
- locally housed region wide services (such as BSV etc)
- and very local youth support

It was also conducted with schools of all ages:

- Pre school
- Primary School
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- GEP

Second part

One of the main findings of Ariane's research was the different types of attitudinal barriers to the arts in the Latrobe Valley and that while to some extent Latrobe City Arts was servicing the education sector, the youth sector wasn't really being addressed. Ariane's consultation with local services (run by or) for youth highlighted two main points,

- local young people engage regularly with the arts informally (music, visual arts, choreographed stunts etc), and
- there is a gap to fill in the 'post-service' assistance for local youth. In particular, there is a need to create bridging opportunities which link disadvantaged young people with employment and education.

The Latrobe Valley is one of the most economically disadvantaged communities in Australia, with the most recent unemployment figures reaching 15% (the national average is 4.5%). The Latrobe Valley unemployment has been consistently high for the last 15 years due to major labour force changes to local industry in the early 1990s. Further to this, statistical analysis has tracked a trend towards long term unemployment becoming a second and third generational concern. In order to break this cycle of unemployment there is a need for the creation of more (and more meaningful) employment opportunities for young people.

One of the programs that Ariane and myself became interested in during her research was the Young Ambassadors program run by the NGV. The Young Ambassadors program was developed by the NGV specifically to engage with youth and to capture new audiences after a period of closure of the facilities. The program ran from November 2003- October 2004 and employed young people, initially not in education or employment, with an interest in the visual arts

The Young Ambassadors program provided opportunities for young people to:

- develop personal, educational and employment skills
- gain work experience, arts and business skills, career opportunities

The program enabled young people to:

- develop youth leadership skills
- develop skills in interpreting works of art
- develop an understanding of the core business of the NGV and its public programs
- develop and deliver NGV gallery tours and workshops for a range of audiences
- assist with the development and delivery of public programs and resources for a range of audiences
- contribute to the development and implementation of NGV youth focused events

The program consisted of

- training program consisting of practical and theoretical workshops, presentations, research assistance, mentoring and work experiences, NGV gallery viewings and tours, site visits to and discussions with personnel from other galleries and museums
- youth forums to provide advice and feedback on programs and services for young people at the NGV and
- work experience opportunities in NGV Education and Public Program department

The program was designed to develop a range of skills, leading to further education, training and employment options for participants. The program aimed to develop key skills. These were

Personal Development Skills such as

- Communication and listening skills
- Group dynamics, leadership
- Team building

Employability Skills

Business and entrepreneurial art skills such as

- Development of personal attributes and generic work skills needed for employment
- Understanding the core business of a gallery Knowledge of career options and employment pathways in the arts and related fields

Industry Specific Skills

Vocational skills development and experiences that include:

- Arts appreciation
- Philosophical enquiry and visual literacy
- Tour guiding
- Events management

Literacy Skills

- Literacy skills and experiences gained through research on artists and their work and assistance with the organisation of an exhibition and related programs including development of tours and workshops.

Through discussions with the NGV Young Ambassadors project manager Ruth Komesaroff, who LRG had previously been in contact with for a youth in custody project, we decided that we could address some of the issues raised by Ariane's research by running a regional pilot of the Young Ambassadors program at LRG.

Micro Case study: The development of youth arts program stemming directly from the Youth Arts Program Development Coordinators research and consultation.

As mentioned:

- the impetus for creating the PIR position was that young people were not accessing LCC arts programs.
- the PIR consultation with the youth services revealed that one primary area of concern was the lack of employment opportunities for young people.

With these two issues in mind the LRG recognized in the NGV Young Ambassadors programs a potential solution to these specific concerns.

The desired outcomes are: accessing a particular demographic of audience and developing an arts employment program. This idea of was met with great interest by local youth services that had voiced the issue through the consultation process of the Youth Arts Program development initiative. Thus making connections across the different sectors and building a strong partnership program that continues to be developed together.

LRG and four of local youth services submitted a partnership proposal to VicHealth, which outlined the Regional Pilot of the NGV Young Ambassadors program in April 2005, and was subsequently funded as part of the Audience Development scheme.

The NGV have stayed with the LRG as program mentors (now facilitated by the VicHealth program structure). The NGV are interested to observe how we have developed the program utilizing their hindsight and with consideration to the difference in position between urban and regional settings.

The different organizational size has been one of the more substantial points of difference between the regional pilot and the mentor program. The LRG, being a smaller facility, has had the advantage of providing a more in-depth experience of gallery operations for its participants, by giving access to observe (and often try out) every area of gallery operation.

The LRG pilot runs for two years, with two separate intakes of 4 Young Ambassadors in each year. The LRG program has created an additional tier, (supported by the RE Ross Trust) in that there is one position dedicated to a young arts worker gaining experience in program coordination. This position has filled by a local young person who was formerly an NGV Young Ambassador program participant.

The essential benefits to the running of the program are:

- for LRG, this program is a direct line of communication with local young people, their language, their impressions of art and arts institutions such as ours. The LRG recognizes this as an opportunity to review the existing mechanisms for engaging young audiences.
- for the young people who fill these positions, this is an opportunity to walk into an arts job without any previous experience required. They will be employed to actively create an arts event for other young people. The LRG provides the training for the young people to receive accredited certificates in Museum Practice. The first intake of LRG Young Ambassadors started their employment with LRG in March 2006, and they are amazing.

- The LRG Young Ambassadors Program is just one micro case study resulting from the Youth Arts Program Development initiative.

While Latrobe City Arts has not yet ensured that every young person within Latrobe City is accessing at least one LCC Arts program per year, there are now young people actively making changes from within the arts team.

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