

**Report on forum: ‘Working Outside the Box:
the role of cultural facilities in community strengthening’,
Plenty Ranges Convention Centre, Monday 8th May 2006**

This event, organized by a partnership of the Cultural Development Network, Regional Arts Victoria, Museums Australia Victoria, Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres and the Cities of Hume and Yarra Valley was attended by approximately 160 people, including 30 presenters. Attendees were spread across professional sectors, with most coming from local government, and smaller numbers from performing arts centres, museums, art galleries and other arts centres respectively. There were also several artists and independent artworkers and volunteers from community arts organizations. Attendees came from metropolitan, interface, regional and rural areas of Victoria with three also hailing from interstate (Tasmania and NSW). Two representatives from facilities working with non-mainstream populations were from the Keeping Place indigenous museum at Bairnsdale and the Australian Vietnamese Women’s Association.

Program:

Wurundjeri elder, Ian Hunter opened the day with an interesting reflection in his process of becoming an indigenous performer. This was followed by the official opening by Bruce Mildenhall, Parliamentary Secretary from the State Government’s Department of Premier and Cabinet, who described the state government’s commitment to arts and community and the contribution the arts can make to the strength of local communities, which is a current political priority.



Wurundjeri elder, Ian Hunter

Keynote speaker Paul Reeve, Director of Education from the Royal Opera House, London, spoke about his organisation’s long standing program of engagement with schools and communities in England, especially those who are not traditional theatre goers. He showed a very engaging DVD of a contemporary version of the opera ‘La Boheme’ that included hip-hop, beat-boxing and real opera music, created and performed by young people from a multi-cultural inner city London neighbourhood. John Kirkman, CEO of the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, Lewers Bequest and Penrith Regional Gallery and Anne Loxley, Manager of Penrith Regional Gallery in western Sydney described exhibitions they have developed on the theme of healing for communities. They referred to three particular examples; an exhibition and installation about Timor developed with their local Timorese community, an exhibition called Remembering Anita, a tribute to Anita Cobbey, a western Sydney resident who was brutally murdered some years before and a current exhibition about schizophrenia that will include art made by people living with schizophrenia as well as those whose lives are impacted by the condition.



Keynote speakers, (L to R) John Kirkman, Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, Paul Reeve, Royal Opera House, Anne Loxley, Penrith Regional Gallery

The late morning session was comprised of case studies divided into two streams: Programming and Planning, featuring presentations on these topics;

Paul Streefkerk, Director, Cultural Facilities, City of Greater Dandenong: *'Making facilities and management more responsive to community needs'*.

Carina Clement, Manager, Albury Libraries: *'Taking the community along for the ride, or are we? The evolution of Albury's cultural precinct'*

Louise Tegart, Director, Latrobe Regional Gallery and Ariane Ramsay, Professional in Residence, Latrobe City Council: *'Opening doors to young people': research to gauge their needs and interests'*.

Jason Eades, CEO, Koorie Heritage Trust: *'Strengthening indigenous culture through outreach programs'*.

Merryn Tinkler, Arts Development Co-ordinator, Cube 37, Frankston Arts Centre: *'Engaging young people in outer metropolitan areas'*

Peter Haffernden, Director, Living Museum of the West: *'Dealing with local issues, especially those of newly arrived migrants'*

Issues that the presentations covered included: The contribution of an arts facility to the strength of local community. What was the project and who was involved? What were the challenges? What were the outcomes for the community? How did you know that the community was stronger as a result of this project?

The afternoon sessions included a discussion about Cultural Indicators led by Professor Mike Salvaris from Victoria University. This was complemented by a panel discussion with case study presenters from the morning reflecting on how they might apply cultural indicators to measure the outcomes of their own programs. Many comments from participants indicated that people are keen to know more about Cultural Indicators. This seems a good topic for future discussions.

The final session of the day was a Hypothetical discussion led by Professor Peter Sheldrake from RMIT with a group of 'stakeholders' from the fictitious community of Batman. This panel was trying to make a decision about how best to spend a grant of \$250,000 on a community strengthening project involving the arts. This involved participants playing roles of the Mayor, local journalist, community development worker, local visionary artist, state government representative and an overseas consultant. The audience overall enjoyed this session very much responding with comments like *'a great way to end the day, fabulous, funny and oh so real, comforting'*



Panelist L to Rs: Paul Reeve, (Royal Opera House), Merle Hathaway, (Horsham Regional gallery), James Buick, (Moonee Valley Council), Professor Peter Sheldrake (facilitator, RMIT), Clifton Kline, (Eye2Eye Theatre), Sian Prior, (freelance journalist) Cr John Fry, (Whittlesea Council), Paul Holton (Latrobe Council)

General comments about the forum included:

Evaluations were very positive overall, with attendees particularly valuing hearing an international speaker, case studies relevant to their own work situation, an amusing hypothetical discussion, an introduction to issues of measuring cultural indicators and opportunities for networking within and across cultural facility sectors. Comments included:

Fantastic program and speakers, thought provoking, thanks

Well-worth attending, thankyou

*Great concept, loved the networking opportunities and the awareness of whats going on
A terrific day*

Speakers:

Overall people responded positively about speakers, with keynote speaker from England, Paul Reeve receiving very favourable comments such as *'excellent'* and *'inspiring and engaging'*. Attendees commented about the range and diversity of speakers and their topics, how they enjoyed the great sharing of practical knowledge and hearing about ideas that could be employed in their own situations. There was some criticism directed at speakers who took more than their allotted time and those who seemed less well prepared. Most people found the topics presented very relevant to the work and very or somewhat useful in their own situations.

Area for improvement included:

Management of timing of sessions and quality control of speakers and presentations.