

## **‘Outcomes of a research project on communities and organisations in north Geelong’**

*Presented by Sue Hartigan, Geelong Arts Alliance and Back to Back Theatre Company, on behalf of Dale Newman, community development worker, Barwon Health*

**as part of the ‘Art and Craft of Research in Communities’ Forum, April 28, 2006 presented by the Cultural Development Network in partnership with RMIT’s Globalism Institute**

Corridor One 4, an arts and culture action group in the northern suburbs of Geelong (a Barwon Health driven initiative) is the direct result of Dr Deb Warr’s research, *‘There’s Good and Bad Everywhere You Go’*. I want to give a brief insight on this connection and why Deb’s research was taken up by a community health organisation.

There are many myths assigned to neighbourhoods experiencing high rates of unemployment and poverty. During her research within Corio and Norlane, Deb collected media reports with sensationalist headlines including an Internet circulation of a monopoly game entitled Corio with board options including: ‘Sleep with your sister to advance to go’ or ‘You turned 13, have a baby’ or ‘Sell heroin, collect \$500-00’. The game has 32 chances of landing on ‘GO TO JAIL’. Those of us working and living in the area welcomed any research with credibility that could impact on the misconception that Corio and Norlane are anything less than communities of diversity and richness.

The negative impact of stigma on people’s health and well-being has been well evidenced and documented (none the least of which is Deb’s research). Through the presentation and dissemination of her report, *‘There’s Good and Bad Everywhere You Go’* a debate, which ordinarily occurs between community development workers, opened up into a much broader arena, as a small group of people living and /or working in the area started to discuss ways of promoting a more holistic and balanced perspective of what it means to be part of this community.

Deb interviewed people with important stories to tell regarding their experiences of living within a community consistently defined as disadvantaged. The northern area of Geelong has long been the target of statistical attention and studies that describe burden of disease. These studies run the risk of perpetuating further the labelling and discrimination assigned to individuals and communities.

People day things like, ‘You know, when everyone comes home from Melbourne it’s, ‘Oh! There’s the refinery, we’re nearly home. Like you know, wouldn’t it be nice if there was something else? But no there’s the refinery. We’re nearly home now. Nothing exciting, that’s our little moment coming home’.

The northern suburbs of Geelong are an authentic and diverse series of communities, filled with creativity and people’s experiences, stories we need to value and indeed celebrate. An area generally described as austere and barren is much more than empty.

**Deb’s research made an impact** because:

- It provided actual evidence and documentation that social and economic disadvantage are significant to how communities create, exchange and benefit from social capital
- It highlighted real life stories of people’s experience living in Corio and Norlane
- It provided a balanced perspective of the diversity and strengths of a so called ‘disadvantaged community’
- It highlighted the impact of stigma on people’s health.

Deb's research set us all a challenge. It commenced an important debate around the dilemmas of targeting resources into particular areas based on statistics and the way this can also perpetuate a sense of exclusion and stigma from within and outside of these communities.

Following the release of Deb's research, we (Barwon Health) took up the challenge. Our organisation has a strong commitment to the value of cultural and community development for its positive and lasting effect on people's health and as consequence, we have developed some new initiatives. The most major is the establishment of Corridor One 4, an action group of workers and residents from north Geelong whose aim is 'to celebrate arts, culture and people in the north'. We established the terms of reference for the group with the research outcomes in mind.

### **Corridor ONE 4 action group on arts and culture**

#### **Membership**

The membership of this group is open to anyone with a focus on celebrating arts, culture and people in the north, and increasing opportunities for participation in arts and cultural development activities that enhance the health of the community.

#### **How we do this?**

Members come together on a monthly or as required basis to participate in and contribute equally to actions that have direct influence on arts and cultural development in the north. Members of Corridor 1 4 work collectively to influence change at a policy making level around the value and importance of community arts.

#### **Terms of reference**

- To encourage and support creative collaborations between people in the North, artists and organisations to create new art work and new forms of working together.
- To increase community participation and involvement in the arts
- To profile and resource existing and new community artists and projects within the North.
- To ensure art is accessible and owned by the community
- To create a media strategy focused on arts and cultural development in the North
- To enhance existing arts and cultural development activities in the North
- To incorporate cultural and linguistically diverse groups within all aspects of the Group
- To promote creative use of community art space and venues within the North
- To encourage social action research within the area of community arts and culture
- To ensure evidence based practise influences agencies, organisations and policy makers
- To document and evaluate all activities of the Corridor 1 4 group

An early project of this group is 'Northern Exposure', a digital storytelling project to be undertaken in partnership with ACMI – Australian Centre for the Moving Image. This project aims to increase participation in local community activities by engaging ten people living within the north Geelong area to tell and record their personal stories in a digital format. These experiences, diverse and colourful, will impact on the misconceptions surrounding the area. The project will also provide important bridging networks highlighted through Deb's research. 'Northern Exposure' will commence in August this year and we look forward to a screening as part of the cultural development of Victoria.

#### **Why Deb's approach worked?**

There are things specific to Deb's approach as a researcher and human being that are worth reflecting on: my favourite recollection of Deb is of her sitting amidst a small group of woman at the Rosewall Neighbourhood House sewing and chatting. This epitomises for me

what was unique and wondrous about Deb's approach to action research – authenticity and stillness amidst observation.

At the time Deb conducted her research, the area was a virtual hive of capacity building activity. Initiatives such as Community Building and Neighbourhood Renewal hadn't long commenced and there were often 'suits and skirts' at launches that the everyday community were oblivious to. (Fortunately this has since changed).

However it highlighted Deb's way of coming in quietly and leaving quietly, with some of the real stories and experiences. Her approach included:

- valuing peoples' experience
- correcting misconceptions
- respect
- being in for the long haul.

The people involved in the research felt heard, respected and valued. Although Deb was clearly an outsider, there was no 'us and them' with her approach.

Finally I would love to be there as part of the discussion panel to see the connections between research and practice. Synchronicity is a wondrous thing. In the same way that Kim Dunphy and I came together, I feel certain those of us working within community cultural development in Geelong will once again connect at a future forum. We look forward to showcasing the diverse and creative talents of people living in Rosewall, Norlane, Corio and North Geelong soon.

I invite anyone with more specific questions relating to Northern Exposure or Corridor One4 to contact me at [dalen@barwonhealth.org.au](mailto:dalen@barwonhealth.org.au)

### **Quotes about life in north Geelong**

'The people are just nice people, down to earth, like, you know, there's no snobs here, they just seem to be my cup of tea, you know'

'Down the back of the Grammar School, too, there's a marina so you get the sea breeze on a warm night and that sort of thing because that's really nice'

**Dale Newman**  
**Community Development Worker**  
**Barwon Health**  
**2 Gellibrand Street, Corio Vic 3214**  
**Ph: 5273 2240 [dalen@BarwonHealth.org.au](mailto:dalen@BarwonHealth.org.au)**