

'Engaging Communities Through the Arts'

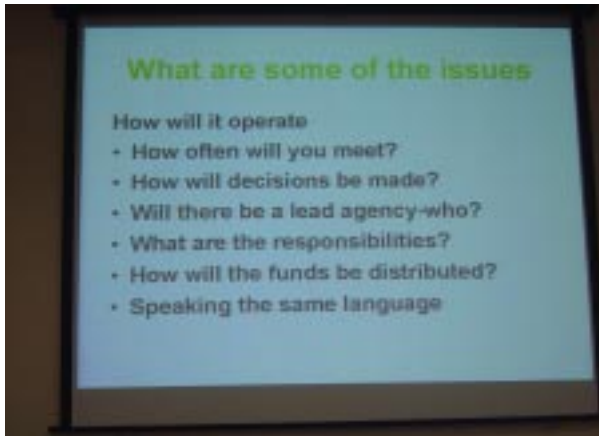
**Monday 31 July, Horsham presented by Regional Arts Victoria
in partnership with Leadership Wimmera, the Cultural Development Network
and VicHealth.**

This one day forum explored the opportunities and possibilities of utilising the arts as a medium to engage communities. It was attended by 85 participants, a diverse audience of local artists and artworkers, staff and managers from sectors including health, environment, education, community services and arts. The event was facilitated with great humour and liveliness by raconteur Ian Pidd, with speakers including Kim Dunphy from the Cultural Development Network, Bin Dixon-Ward from Regional Arts Victoria, Sue Ball from VicHealth and Regional Arts Development Officers, Marion Matthews, Liz Andrews and Verity Higgins.



Kim Dunphy described diverse arts initiatives that have successfully engaged local communities on a range of issues, with approaches including 'social marketing', story-telling, community visioning, research, festivals and celebrations. Bin Dixon-Ward from Regional Arts Victoria spoke about strategies to make an arts project work, including a matrix for planning considering the different interests of artists, organisations, participants and audiences. Sue Ball discussed partnerships in community arts projects, describing various styles of partnership and the elements that contribute to their productivity. She referred attendees to the resource for partnerships in community arts that VicHealth has recently commissioned. This is available for download from their website at

http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/Partnership_Resource_for_Community_Arts.pdf



Regional Arts Development Officer Marion Matthews discussed possible funding sources for future projects.



A panel of regional artswriters spoke about the community impact of projects they had coordinated. Regional Arts Development Officer Liz Andrews described about the ‘Social Fabric’ weaving and tapestry project in Swan Hill that brought new migrants and long established residents together over shared interests in fabric arts with outcomes including new friendships, sharing of skills and stories, attraction of resources, raising of profile and positive discussion about a particular community issue. Liz gave the following tips for successful and sustainable projects.



Regional Arts Development Officer Verity Higgins spoke about and played a DVD of media projects she had led with indigenous communities in Ballarat. Artsworkeer Ian Pidd described a community theatre project he led in Tasmania, in which residents in local street were slowly and surreptitiously engaged in creating a piece of community theatre that was attended by audiences bussed past.

Threaded throughout the formal sessions for the day were group discussions centred around interest areas. Focussing on themes including Mens Sheds, young people, environmental sustainability, older adults, health and well-being, table participants brainstormed ideas for possible arts projects to engage local communities, as well as suitable partnerships and possible funding sources. By the end of the day each group had come up with an interesting idea for a project, some specific partners and likely funders. Ian and Marion then offered these projects to interested organisations and individuals with the intention that they be developed to fruition.



Feedback

48 feedback forms were received- an almost 50% response rate. Overall people found the day very valuable, with new ideas developed and some excellent new connections made. Suggestions for improvement include presenters having Powerpoint back-up for their talks to help people keep focussed, and even more time to talk! Event organisers will do a follow up evaluation over a year to see if any of these projects actually take off.

Papers available from the day include:

'Consider the arts: Engaging leaders and communities in new ways', Kim Dunphy, Manager, Cultural Development Network

'Partnership Resource for Community Arts' described by Sue Ball from VicHealth
http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/Partnership_Resource_for_Community_Arts.pdf

'The Making of Makin Pitchas', a Koori Youth Video Project, Verity Higgins
<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/downloads/vol2iss4.pdf>

Funds for community based arts projects, Marion Matthews, Regional Arts Victoria





The Cultural Development Network's Forums program is sponsored by the City of Melbourne

