

**‘Just Culture’ symposium: arts and social change, part of:  
‘Just Communities’ National LGCSAA Conference  
25 – 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2005**

This recent forum was a sell-out success. More than 90 people including local government arts and culture workers, community and social planners and managers, councillors, community artists and artworkers and academics attended and participated in active discussion, as audience members and participants in art-making. Deb Mills, consultant and author of *Art and Wellbeing* presented a brief overview of the value of community cultural development in social transformation (and why local government is a key player). Deb's paper is available from the CDN website. Warren Moloney, President, Victorian Local Governance Association, with the assistance of Jon Stevens, gave a humorous overview of the policy context in local government in Victoria, focussing especially on community planning and community engagement (including innovative approaches using cultural processes) and social inclusion. Judy Spokes presented a short overview of the Cultural Development Network's Generations project in which five Councils (including Geelong, Wangaratta, and Latrobe) will use an arts-based approach to engage their communities in challenging local issues and dilemmas between 2006 – 2008.

Catherine Simmonds, Director, Brunswick Womens Theatre, spoke about her journey as a community theatre practitioner and presented her company in an excerpt from ‘Just Around the Corner’, a theatre project that engaged women from various ethnic backgrounds in an exploration of the hazards of gambling and the need to promote better government policy and planning regulations to combat the spread of pokies.

This was followed by a stimulating panel discussion about arts and social change, led by Deb Mills, and including comments from panellists Jerril Rechter, Director, Footscray Community Arts Centre, Lisa Sammut, Manager, Ozanam House, Daryl Taylor, Community Planner, Shire of Yarra Ranges, Meme McDonald, author, Artistic Co-ordinator, Generations Project and Xris Reardon, social activist and forum theatre practitioner. This discussion triggered thinking about dilemmas and future directions for community cultural development practices, processes and priorities from the floor. Small group discussions were led by Mandy Press, former Neighbourhood Development Manager, City of Port Phillip. Topics of consideration by participants included ‘practices or projects in which you were involved or observed that you feel worked well;

What was the practice-how was it done?

What was intended-what happened?

What is promising about this practice?’

To finish off the day, composer and musician Irine Vela led the audience in ‘Ben Venuti el Tabaret’, a lively song from ‘Just Around the Corner’.

Responses to the event were all favourable, with attendees overwhelmingly reporting that the event and the standard of speakers was Excellent or Very Good.

Comments included;

*Thought, provoking, engaging, entertaining, personal*

*Good range of presentations, provocative and thoughtful*

*Very stimulating*

*Good cross section, particularly liked facilitated discussion*

Participants commented that they learned:

*To take risks*

*Of the need to learn to accept failure*

*Of the need for art to be a part of all areas of council programs/ services*

*Sharing of information and building future relationships*

*That there are many different ways of achieving success when working with communities*

*Different ccd practice models in place*