



Expanding Cultures

Arts and Local Government Conference

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STRENGTHENING THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY IN SMITH STREET - THE DIRTY MILE

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Abstract

This presentation features 'The Dirty Mile' street theatre performance that took audiences on a journey of Indigenous history, highlighting places of social and community significance to past and present Indigenous communities around inner Melbourne's Fitzroy. The discussion highlights the positive outcomes of collaboration; particularly the role of the artistic collaborators and their approach to working with a community partner for each project which offers significant opportunities for local councils to assist in the development, implementation and local promotion of these events. The collaboration on this production has assisted in the continued strengthening of the relationship between this community and council.

The project:

In March 2005, the Dirty Mile street theatre performance took audience members on a journey of over one hundred years of Indigenous history, highlighting the places of social and community significance to past and present Indigenous communities in and around inner Melbourne's Gertrude Street, Fitzroy.

The success of the project came from the partnerships developed between the theatre company, local government and a community based advocacy group. The performance was presented by Ilbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-operative. Community partners for the project, Parkies Vic Inc. played a role in informing the development of the production, telling personal stories at each performance and assisting in marshalling duties. The City of Yarra supported the project through a cash contribution and logistical support.

The Dirty Mile makes a contribution towards reconciliation through fostering understanding and awareness of Aboriginal history in the broader community and highlighting the significance of collaborations between different sectors of the community.

The role of the artistic collaborators and their approach to working with a community partner for each project offers significant opportunities for local councils to assist in the development, implementation and local promotion of these events.

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In this case, the Parkies played a pivotal role in providing local stories and as a result, Parkies members have also been trained in warden duties and work on a number of community festivals and events in these roles. Some also took part as wardens in this production. The collaboration on this production has assisted in continued strengthening of the relationship between this community organisation and Yarra Council.

The partners:

Formed for and by the Victorian Indigenous community, **Ilbjerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Theatre Cooperative** is the longest running Indigenous Theatre organisation and the only one in Victoria. The cooperative is committed to producing innovative and challenging Indigenous works that speak to and reflect the lives, culture and history of Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The **City of Yarra** is a compact, vibrant and diverse inner city municipality. Located immediately north-east of the Melbourne Central Business District, the original inhabitants and traditional owners of the land are the Wurundjeri Aboriginal people. Yarra continues to be an important meeting place for Aboriginal people in Victoria, and is home to a number of major Aboriginal organisations. The organisation has a strong commitment to Wurundjeri Reconciliation and Social Justice through its *Aboriginal Partnership Plan 2004-2008*.

The **Parkies** advocate for Aboriginal people meeting in the Collingwood area and its members play a role as representatives on a number of key committees in the City of Yarra including the Street People Committee. Members have also taken a lead role in major community events such as NAIDOC in the Park, Sorry Day and the Dirty Mile production.

Kylie Belling is Artistic Director of Ilbjerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Theatre Cooperative, the longest running Indigenous theatre organisation and the only one in Victoria. The cooperative is committed to producing innovative and challenging Indigenous works that speak to and reflect the lives, culture and history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

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