



Expanding Cultures

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LINKING GLENROY: a collaboration between Moreland City Council, youth agencies and the young people of Glenroy

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This presentation will explore how the arts are integral to the development of notions of self, community and place and in explorations of diversity. The 'Linking Glenroy' Project began in 2004 to increase community capacity building and wellbeing in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. Arts activities including stencil art, performance, rap and beat box, film and public art have been used to explore ideas of community and identity, increase self-esteem, develop skills and express the unique stories of the individuals who make up the community of Glenroy. Moreland Council is committed to structures that will integrate the arts into community planning and engagement.

This is a story about innovative partnerships.

To begin, I looked up partnership with my Microsoft Tools and found some interesting synonyms for partnership:

- company
- business
- enterprise
- organisation
- joint venture
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The story I'm about to tell you does involve these types of partnerships, but one essential concept was missing: Anybody have any idea?

Yes, relationships.

The reason this project is successful and the reason it is innovative is all about the relationships that grew out of working together and creating together.

In any good story there's a setting: Glenroy

Glenroy is in the northwest corner of Moreland, nestled between the Western Ring Road, the Cemetery and Moonee Ponds valley. It has grown profoundly since the 1950s from an agrarian country town to a full fledged suburb. Before amalgamation it was part of Broadmeadows and despite the Ring Road, there is still a huge attachment to Broady and many Glenroy residents look to Hume City Council or their retail and service needs rather than their own municipality.

It needs to be pointed out that there are few recreational facilities appropriate for young people in Glenroy. There is a leisure centre in Oak Park and plenty of other sporting facilities, and an outstanding Neighbourhood House. The secondary college is far more than adequate – the staff there are part of this collaboration and many others that benefit their student's social and creative development. No movie theatres, bowling alley, skate park, rec centre, clubhouse... just a lot of social services.

Key to the story is the cast of characters.

- young people who live, study or are affiliated with agencies in Glenroy
- council and some of their friends in state government
- agencies and schools
- the wider Glenroy Community

So now, to begin.

Once, not so long ago – 2003 – Moreland City Council undertook a community mapping project in Glenroy, Oak Park and Hadfield. The area was targeted by the Department of Family and Community Services as an area of high socio-economic disadvantage.

The mapping project which consulted widely, identified five priority needs.

1. opportunities for young people to develop life skills
2. increase of the connectedness of service providers and community groups to respond to the local community
3. strengthening of support for individuals and families
4. improvement of the amenity infrastructure and economy of the area
5. implementation of initiatives to support the changing profile of the community

The first two of these needs were addressed in the 'Living in Glenroy' project, which was funded by Moreland City Council and the Victorian Government Community Support Fund.

In local government, there are people who carry out their roles like modern day alchemists – social planners, community development types, youth workers and those in arts and culture. I call them alchemists because they change concepts of disadvantage into opportunities for value.

Deborah Mills and Paul Brown, in the publication of the Australia Council called *Art and Wellbeing: A Guide* made this same distinction, between an instrumental approach to using art as a tool for implementing policy and a transformational approach that allows '*creative activity to help determine policy by developing and negotiating shared understandings of various policy challenges and mapping out solutions.*'

At Moreland, some of these folks got together and made a plan to address some of these needs. The resulting project, 'Living in Glenroy', was funded by the Victorian Government with support from all the participating organisations and Moreland City Council. Living in Glenroy involved seven youth agencies working with groups of young people and Moreland City Council to work on creative projects and carry out a week of events that showcased the young people's work to the community. This was by design an instrumental approach, but the transformational approach crept in. For example, part way into the planning process for the week of events, the young people insisted on changing the name from Living in Glenroy to 'Hey, We're Here: The Voice of Youth'.

The participants in 'Living in Glenroy' were:

- Anglicare Youth Services – performance project

- Moreland Hall – art therapy
- Moreland Community Health Service – develop an expressive and informational piece
- Box Forest Secondary College
- Koorie Open Door Education – theatre project
- Youth Projects - magazine
- Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre – Aerosol art project

When the project finished, many of the young people asked for more...

The alchemists put their heads together to work out what could be done. They continued working their magic...this time in a grand way.

Addressing the same five priority needs identified in the mapping project in 2003, there were three parts to 'Linking Glenroy'.

1. New, purpose built Glenroy Community Centre that houses Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre, Maternal and Child Health, Moreland Community Health Service
2. Creation of a community group, the Glenroy Task Force
3. 'Giving Youth a Voice' – more commonly known by young people as Liking Glenroy Exhibition and Performance

The aim of 'Giving Youth a Voice' was to build a greater sense of community and enable young people to take greater pride in their area. This was accomplished through a partnership with seven agencies.

Five of the seven agencies had also participated in 'Living in Glenroy' Project in 2004. What wasn't anticipated was that the participants grabbed the opportunity to continue the work together, but adopting a transformational approach where the work, while still intended to carry out policy was also a powerful vehicle for informing policy and solutions.

I'll take you through project by project via the lead agencies. But it's important to say, although I'm sure you know, that words and a picture don't do the energy and creativity justice. The power of these projects is in the process as well as the outcome, what you're seeing here is just a shadow of a memory compared to the real thing.

Anglicare Glenroy

Using the theme, *What is a Community*, 18 participants between 14 and 17 years, students from Box Forest Secondary College and Broadmeadows Secondary College, created a film that celebrated the diverse nature of the young people in the area. The project provided these young people an opportunity to express their views. Their feedback on the project was that they felt empowered, they enjoyed the opportunity and most of all built a sense of connectedness with the broader community.

Victorian Arabic Social Services

Anti-Racism Action Band is brilliant young energy. Young people from thirty different cultures performed a mix of hip hop, rap, belly dance and beat boxing that was an improvised response to the art created by other participants in the Linking Glenroy project. The performance linked some of the different projects and involved the audience as well.

Moreland Community Health Service

Staff from Co-Care Youth Health Service worked with Box Forest Secondary College students and their student welfare coordinator to produce a mural displayed at Anglicare Youth Services in Glenroy. The mural was only the visible result of the process which was an exploration of how people, places and events can influence wellbeing.

Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre's VCAL students worked with a contemporary urban stencil artist to create artwork for display. Some of these were displayed in shopfronts along the two major shopping strips in Glenroy. Others began what has continued as an important and continuing theme for public art in Glenroy – Art Spots. These were created on large circles of plywood, which were used to guide people to the learning centre for the launch of 'Giving Youth a Voice'.

Uniting Care, Moreland Hall continued and expanded the important work begun in the Living in Glenroy project. This gave young people who were clients in a youth substance withdrawal unit the opportunity to express themselves creatively, gaining powerful insight into how their past and present issues may be affecting their current situation. Participants gain self-esteem by seeing their works displayed publicly and discover a voice for expression that they can continue to use for the rest of their lives.

Glenroy Specialist School, Yooralla and The Victorian College of Koorie Education

collaborated on a series of photographs of their community. Not only did they create a series of colourful, fascinating images, but they began a relationship between these two schools that has continued both in further creative collaboration and social activities.

There was a transformational week where it all came together, much of it in the streets and shop windows of Glenroy for the amazement and enjoyment of the community. Imagine people who went to the shops expecting just to run their errands discovering creativity and colourful expression. Remember what it is like to look at an image and suddenly see that subject in a new way. We are used to it because our work involves art, but this is a suburb without a gallery, without a studio a small event like this can have a profound effect.

'The arts do a great job in reaching people. Arts allow people to tell their story in their own voice. It doesn't measure, it creates. It doesn't judge, it includes. It also creates a dialogue between those that may never ordinarily meet.'
(VicHealth letter – Arts for Health 2004)

This is the part of the story where we're supposed to say, And They Lived Happily Ever After.

But...

This story has no end. Even though 'Living in Glenroy' and 'Linking Glenroy' were separate projects with a beginning and end, there has been a sense of continuity and a natural sustainability.

What happened next:

Moreland City Council received expressions from many of the young people, most of the agencies and members of the community about wanting to continue this work.

A number of collaborations between the agencies have emerged

What has grown out of these partnerships

- Mission Australia and Box Forest Secondary college continued the Art Spots theme with digital art mounted on what used to be a dreary wall facing a car park. A mentored approach to the Art Spots grew into another project, a community kitchen garden at the secondary college.
- Continued collaboration between some of the agencies, for example Anglicare, Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre and Moreland Community Health have put together a proposal for a magazine type project that would give local young people a vehicle for speaking up and being heard.
- AYN project; ARAB participating with KODE, Glenroy Specialist School and others culminating in a performance in October
- These are only some examples. I have a time limit so I'll stop here, but it's clear now that the relationships built through 'Linking Glenroy' have continued and the collaborations and rewards to the community will keep coming indefinitely.

So what have we noticed? You can call these theoretical learnings.

- the arts based projects are the ones that continue. Something about creating together is right in Glenroy.
- collaborations happen out of relationships. Relationships are key to this whole process.
- the projects are not about the actual art, but the relationships that develop and the understandings and growth that come from the relationships.
- the roles appropriate to a local council?
- being a portal for artists to make a contribution to their community.
- steering artists and young people through the bureaucratic labyrinth to get their art shown and their views expressed.
- assisting, resourcing, linking, referring and generally adding value and relationship to what service providers already do well.

So in closing it would be easy to say that the combination of arts and relationship can create positive change. Creativity and collaboration have become 'the way we do things in Glenroy.'

*Prior to migrating to Australia 12 years ago, **Paula Jorgensen** worked as a design consultant for a living and directed summer camps for love. In Melbourne, the absence of summer camps led to community work. Her motivation is an interest in people – their stories, passions and creativity -- and the energy that develops in organisations and in communities when people work together. When not at work, Paula can be found creating in the kitchen with her children or expressing her commitment to community participation in her neighbourhood.*

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