

My name is Amanda Owen and I am the Cultural Liveability officer for Latrobe City Council. My primary role is to manage community arts projects and promote the arts and artists in the Latrobe Valley and the wider region.

Hello, it's a pleasure to be here with you today, and thank you to CDN for inviting me.

First up I would like to share some information about our region in general; some of the ways Latrobe City Council is involving the community in discussions around climate change and sustainability through formal processes; and then tell you about the ways the organisation have used the arts to engage, to inform and to encourage discussion.

If you could bear with me for just a moment, I think it's important to place my talk into context by telling you a little bit about the Latrobe Valley and its singular link to climate change.

It is important to say this because, for reasons you will hear in a moment, climate change is not perceived in the abstract by the people in our neck of the woods.

Rather, the climate change issue is understood as something that could potentially have significant implications for the ongoing sustainability, vitality and wellbeing of the Latrobe City community.

Here are a couple of facts to chew on...

Energy generation in the Latrobe Valley is achieved by mining brown coal. It has contributed to the economic prosperity of Victoria for the last 90 years, and currently supplies over 90% of Victoria's electricity requirements.

Given its long history, it is not surprising that energy sector and coal mining activities dominate the economic profile of Latrobe City. With a population of 73,000 and growing, approximately 3,100 jobs (ABS 2006) are linked directly to these sectors, and an additional 8 jobs were found to be sustained for every 10 jobs in the electricity sector (Compelling Economics 2008).

That means a total of 5,600 jobs sustained by electricity sector activities.

However, the brown coal electricity generation industries in the Latrobe Valley have been identified as vulnerable under emissions reduction, and it is recognised that mitigation measures will undoubtedly affect our community as we move towards a low carbon emissions future.

It is worth noting that in the 1990's the Latrobe Valley underwent a difficult structural adjustment process following the privatisation of the electricity sector, and many lessons have been learned from that.

Namely, that the detrimental impacts on the community following major structural change can be lessened or avoided by early and co-ordinated intervention through partnerships between local government, the private sector and the community.

Latrobe City is leading the region by being the first council to promote its activities in addressing climate change by forming the *Latrobe City Climate Change Consultative Committee*.

The committee's mandate is to act as an advocate and sounding board for the community and other stakeholders, bringing to the attention of council any issues of concern regarding the response to climate change.

The organisation has also formed the *Low Carbon Emissions Future Transition Committee* which aims to advocate for the community in relation to the transition to a low carbon future.

It brings together representatives from Council, the power industry, engineering, small business, manufacturing, education, forestry and farming sectors. It also includes unions and relevant state and commonwealth departments.

Climate change advisor Professor Ross Garnaut recently addressed the Committee during which clarification from the professor on a range of issues such as potential impacts of a carbon reduction scheme was sought.

The committees mentioned above are just two examples of how Latrobe City Council formally engages the community around the issue of climate change.

Council recognises that the arts are a fundamental element in the wellbeing and cultural richness of the City and it commits a hefty budget to the arts and arts infrastructure.

It recognises too that the arts have a unique ability to engage the community in significant issues such as our topic here today, and it has done just that in the past.

In recent years Latrobe City has asked the community a number of questions about climate change, such as:

- What do you know about climate change?
- Do you want to know more?
- What do you want to say about climate change?
- What can you do about climate change?
- What do you think about the future?
- What do you feel about the future?

For a community whose very existence arose out of brown coal mining and energy generation, and who see their place on I think I could safely say every news bulletin about climate change (Hazelwood's chimneys? you know the ones...) ... these are emotive questions.

And I ought to mention in passing that at first our elected Councillors did need a little gentle persuasion, however, they are bright and forward thinking and the benefits of asking these questions in an arts framework were recognised by them soon enough. That is to say,

- community responses would not only help raise council's awareness of people's thoughts and feelings on this important issue, but that

- by using arts to facilitate discussion on climate change community links can be strengthened, information on the issue can be shared, a sense of place and belonging can be affirmed, community pride can be stimulated, and it can bring about a sense of shared responsibility by raising community consciousness.
- furthermore, and always good - the arts encourage people to *think*. And the arts allow people to be *heard* ... and using the arts is a sure fire way of engaging with those of us who are less articulate, less visible, less able.

So what did we do? Amongst other things,

We commissioned a local artist (Shaun Gardner) to design a tree that could be made entirely out of recycled wire and metal. We presented our project to energy distributor SP AusNet and they gave us unrestricted access to their recycling yard and \$10,000 towards the project. We held workshops around the Valley and asked the community to create the leaves, and to inscribe their thoughts on climate change onto them.

We held a short film competition and invited people from across Victoria to make a film about electricity generation. Balwyn High School won the competition and with their film *Disconnected* which depicted what would happen to a group of young people if the power was turned off – they turned into zombies, wouldn't you know?

Other films were of a more serious note and demonstrated that not only are young people au fait with the climate change issue, but are darned clever and creative in expressing their knowledge too.

We held workshops led by community artist Stefanie Robinson with mining unions, mine workers, school groups, disability support groups, indigenous groups, and youth groups to create puppets and flags representing their thoughts on climate change.

They were used in a street parade held in the heart of the Valley at Morwell.

Also at the parade we had information displays from Gippsland Water, organic food outlets, recycled and sustainable clothing makers, Latrobe City Council's environment team, and a community tree planting trailer.

Nearly 4,000 people came along.

We hosted workshops for the *Coal Valley Men's Choir* to work with chorale master *Steve Taberner* to create some musical pieces reflecting their views on climate change, which they performed at the Latrobe Regional Gallery and at the street parade.

These are just some of the arts projects we undertook to engage the community in climate change and sustainability issues.

Some activities cost more than others, of course.

In looking for low cost and innovative climate change arts initiatives, in 2009 we teamed up with the *Gippsland Regional Waste Management Group* and the local arts collective *arc Yinnar* for the inaugural *Gippsland's Creative Waste Exhibition*.

We invited people from across Gippsland: artists, farmers, children and so forth to look around their yard and see what they could make from cast off items. The results were amazing, and some poignant.

The winning entry was a piece by artist Regina Dudek called *Excess Baggage* which is a giant hand bag made from the innerspring of a mattress destroyed in the Black Saturday fires.

Angela Griffiths' installation work *Vanishing Point* was exhibited in the International Power Hazelwood Community Access Gallery at Latrobe Regional Gallery. Her work was a gorgeous representation of Antarctica in lights that showed how global warming is impacting the continent.

And, of course, we commissioned Lloyd to create a work and we were privileged to have *Carbon Obscura*, one of Lloyd's pinprick installations in the Gallery courtyard.

Over 2,000 people came to see these artworks.

Through these activities we have learned that when the issue of climate change and sustainability is addressed using the arts, it is possible to create an environment in which everyone can have a voice and where people can be kept informed.

It is possible for the issue to be discussed openly and creatively.

We have also learned that through these initiatives it is possible to form some fantastic relationships with a diverse cross section of the community and industry.

Support can come from what we might think are unlikely sources.

I would like to stress the importance of including those industries that are on the pointy end of change in all of this. For example, our connection with the energy industry has led to sponsorship of \$130,000 over 3 years from IPR-GDF Suez Australia, owners and operators of the Loy Yang B Power Station for the Latrobe Regional Gallery's education and public programs .

They were also kind enough to host the media launch of the *Creative Gippsland Be Inspired May Arts Festival* just two weeks ago.

It's possibly counter-intuitive that the industry you think most unlikely to want the climate change issue highlighted would prove to be so supportive. But from what we've learned, it's a myth that the mining industry is not listening or is indifferent to what the community thinks about climate change.

By bringing industry, the community, artists, arts bodies and councils together in the arts is one way of creating effective education, dialogue, expression and change.

And in our particular case, adding somewhat to the ongoing sustainability, vitality and wellbeing of the Valley into the future.

Thank you.