



1

health

Above: *Emma and Tegan*, from Big hART Zeehan, Tasmania. Photo: Christopher Saunders.

1. Health

In the health portfolios of all spheres of government the interaction between community cultural development processes and policy development and implementation takes place. The case studies presented in this guide are:

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth)

A government health agency with a highly regarded long-term community cultural development program

Somebody's Daughter Theatre

A theatre company implementing and provoking government prison policy

Big hART

Youth health and social issues tackled through integrated community cultural development programs; an award winning model

The Artful Dodgers Studio

An artists' studio linked to the Jesuit Social Services, and providing a safe environment for young people at risk.

Policy approaches to health include those which integrate social, environmental and clinical factors. Over at least the last two decades, the application of arts and cultural activities within these approaches has gained acceptance in Australia and overseas, and systematic evaluations demonstrate many benefits. (Our case studies are all well evaluated Australian examples, while overseas research on the influence of the arts appears in Appendix 1.)

One of the most far-reaching integrated approaches is the application of health and wellbeing concepts to the development of cities. For example, the Healthy Cities Program of the World Health Organisation defines a healthy city as one that is:

continually creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources which enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and in developing to their maximum potential. (Hancock and Duhl, 1988)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of Healthy City projects were initiated in industrialised countries in Europe and North America. The Australian pilot projects were implemented in Noarlunga (South Australia), Canberra and Illawarra (NSW) between 1987 and 1990. Community cultural development projects were a feature of these early pilots. While the Healthy Cities program would appear to have lost official momentum, many of the program's principles

live on in the application of concepts such as liveability (natural and built environments for healthy and easy living) by local councils throughout Australia.

Ongoing work is also taking place to integrate the issues of human health with concern for ecological systems. For example, the National Environmental Health Strategy of the Australian Department of Health and Ageing aims to enhance environmental health management nationally by providing a framework to bring together parties interested in a range of issues which encompass environmental health. The strategy states:

There is a growing understanding that good health and wellbeing are linked with the state of the environment ... There is a growing appreciation of the interaction between human lifestyles, consumption patterns and urban settlements with the state of the environment. Additionally there is increased recognition that environmental degradation and overload may lead to new hazards and diseases. As well as minimising health hazards, good management of the environment can make a strong contribution to increasing health and well being ... This strategy explores the relationship between our health and the environment by focussing on: water, air, food, contaminated land, waste management, vector borne diseases, built environment. (Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, 1999)

In outlining its approach to the strategic management of national environmental health and the development of infrastructure for community involvement the policy states the importance of community empowerment:

Community empowerment is a powerful stimulus for change as well as a powerful ally for health and a buffer against the processes that threaten it. (Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, 1999)

Collective creative processes have been used to empower communities and improve the health of individuals for many years in Australia. These have been aimed at:

- identifying healthcare needs
- improving self-esteem and personal development
- improving sensory awareness, mental capacity and physical dexterity
- helping people to communicate effectively with each other
- improving staff and patient relationships and morale
- visually enhancing healthcare environments

- improving the emotional and spiritual state of mental health service users
- promoting positive health messages
- developing creativity in the workplace.

However, the use of creative processes needs broader recognition in the policies of government health agencies. To a large extent, they remain on the margins of health activities and, when they are introduced, it is more often as a one-off project rather than as part of any sustained policy and program commitment.

The case studies show:

- how the process of community cultural development empowers communities to take action on health issues
- the way community cultural development programs and projects have affected government health policy
- how community cultural development projects have affected government structure and organisation in the health arena
- how participation in community cultural development projects has improved individual and community health and wellbeing
- the way community cultural development processes have been used to assist individuals overcome some of the social determinants of ill health.

VicHealth and its partners

In 1999 the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) developed its *Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002*, establishing a framework for the development of research and program activity over a three-year period. The framework focuses on three determinants of mental health: social connection and social inclusion; freedom from discrimination and violence; and economic participation. Arts and creative processes are used to assist individuals strengthen these aspects of their lives as part of an integrated program. The Plan aims to increase participation and access for disadvantaged groups while contributing to the building of community.

The Plan features a Community Arts Participation (CAP) scheme. Launched in 1999 this scheme marked a move away from investment in the arts through sponsorships towards more integrated and evolved partnerships with arts and community organisations.

The population of CAP participants is understood to involve groups of people conventionally isolated from participation in mainstream society—people with intellectual, physical or psychiatric disabilities, long-term unemployed people, young people with drug habits, marginalised young people, and people experiencing isolation in rural communities.

Projects and programs range across many artforms—from theatre projects with people with disabilities, to film projects with the homeless, music and traditional dance events linked to festivals, and workshop programs in dance, circus, drama and music. Community writing has been used, so too a broad range of visual arts programs; for example, a long running artists' studio, a sculpture project, photography, and the creation of public art works.

In supporting this work, VicHealth regards its partnerships with other agencies and arts organisations as a key strategy in line with policy approaches across all government sectors. Agency partners have included youth housing services, schools and tertiary education facilities, social services including those provided by religious organisations, the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, local councils and community health services, festivals and philanthropic trusts.

The Role of VicHealth

In its three-year plan, VicHealth has expressed three key long-term objectives, to:

- promote the benefits and develop clear understandings of creative arts participation to the health sector, general public and governments
- develop the community/arts sectors' knowledge and understanding of health and health promotion
- bring sectors together in project partnerships to explore common interests, such as pathways for projects using creative approaches.

(VicHealth, 2003)

Outcomes

VicHealth's evaluation of the CAP scheme identified specific mental health benefits:

- **Developing positive relationships.** The evaluation observed that the group-based nature of all 28 projects surveyed, combined with the supportive facilitation of community artswriters, resulted in participants developing positive relationships with their peers and the wider community.
- **Gaining public recognition.** The public acknowledgment received by participants through the display of their work was an important aspect of connecting individuals to the wider community. Increased self-esteem was also a result of participation in the scheme.
- **Connecting families.** Families gained new insight into their sons, daughters, mothers and grandmothers. In some cases, participants' involvement led to their first contact with their families for years.
- **Connecting diverse communities.** This was an explicit aim of several projects and was successfully realised in five projects.
- **Connecting with health and welfare organisations.** Most projects reported that, through partnerships with health and welfare organisations, or simply through their broader community networks, participants were frequently referred to other services and organisations. Participants felt an increased sense of belonging to the wider community and of having people who care.
- **Enhancing skills.** A number of projects working with marginalised young people reported improved participation at school or return to school. Other participants developed enhanced confidence and skills in engaging with political processes. Project officers reported the highest levels of participant skills development in learning to work with others and in a team, communicating ideas and information, solving problems, planning and organising activities.
- **Working against discrimination and violence.** For many people, their role in a project allowed other participants and 'observers' to see them differently, with tolerance and understanding increasing from an expanded view of each other.
- **Economic participation and meaningful engagement.** Pathways to employment were created for some participants and many participants were able to imagine futures with a vastly expanded range of options.

(VicHealth, 2003)

A large number of participatory arts organisations have programs of activities which run parallel or link to the developments at VicHealth, and which arguably have driven forward the arts health and wellbeing agenda over the last decade.

VicHealth has funded such organisations to develop and conduct projects and programs. Organisations which have been supported by VicHealth include Somebody's Daughter Theatre, The Artful Dodgers Studio for artists, and Big hART's youth and community projects. Further details on these organisations are provided below. The Victorian Cultural Development Network has been a key body working in partnership with VicHealth, and has provided networking and policy development.

As a strategy for health and wellbeing, VicHealth advocates the long-term security of the community cultural development sector and the enhancement of infrastructure and resources for the arts and health sector. At the same time, critical debate within the community cultural development sector aims to enhance the engagement of health authorities with the arts, specifically through the adoption of principles and values of community cultural development approaches. There is a dynamic and constructive debate between VicHealth and its community cultural development partners, which is building knowledge about approaches to health and wellbeing while helping the development of community cultural development practice and theory.

For further information

Website:

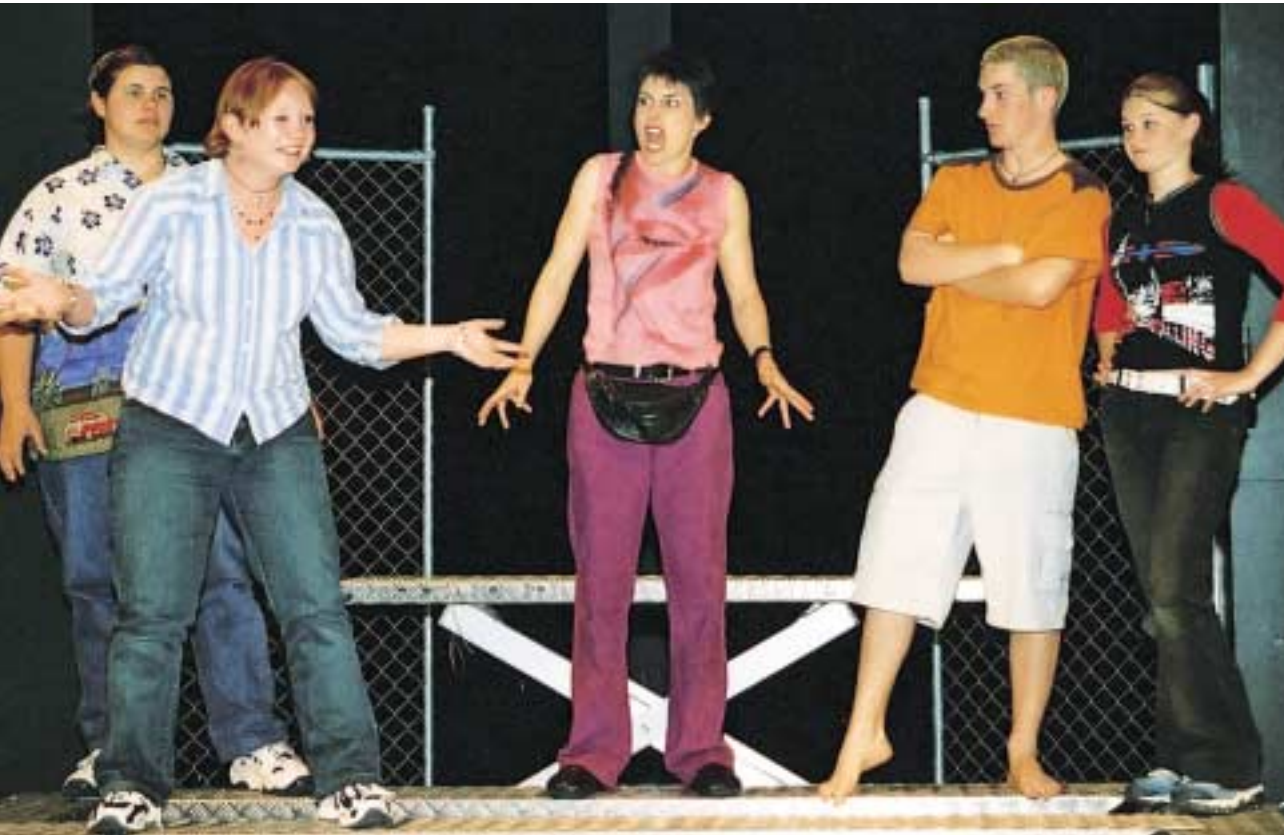
www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

Key publications:

VicHealth (2003), *Creative Connections: Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing through Community Arts Participation*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation *Mental Health Promotion Plan 1999–2002*.

This publication includes six case studies, and reports an evaluation based on a study of 28 projects funded by VicHealth.

VicHealth (2004), *Creative Connections: Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing through the Arts*, 14-minute video. Available from VicHealth free of charge.



Above: *She Wakes, Somebody's Daughter* Theatre. Photo: Jan Osmotherly.

Right: *Chris, Big hART, Strahan, Tasmania.* Photo: Christopher Saunders.



Somebody's Daughter Theatre

This highly regarded community theatre company originated in Fairlea Women's Prison in 1980, and provides an example of sustained and successful linkage between the arts and health through community cultural development practice. Among many achievements and awards, the company received the prestigious VicHealth Innovation in Health Promotion Award in 2001.

With public performances dating from 1991, the company has focused strongly on its work with women in prison and those who have been released, and always links its work to the issues of mental health and wellbeing. It is well known for facilitating transformational discussions and workshops on issues such as drugs, addiction and recovery, as a critical follow-up to performances (Osmotherly, 2002).

Favouring long-term interventions, Somebody's Daughter Theatre devises projects which identify healthcare needs, promote positive health messages and provide an environment where creativity develops more effective communication. Productions, which involve workshops, community writing, art, music and performance, create important social support networks, and through shared creative processes provide practical solutions.

'The company aims to assist women in prison, ex-prisoners and youth at risk, to deal with issues that have caught them in a destructive cycle of self-abuse and self-negation. By facilitating a space where their voice and vision of life's experiences can be shared with others, these people are empowered ... The drama process takes an idea from dream to conception to completion, from a dream to reality—providing an excellent model for anyone who wants to make positive changes in their life.' (Osmotherly, 2002)

The company serves a population that is markedly disadvantaged. Women prisoners are often incarcerated for drug-related or gambling offences; the great majority are victims of multiple

Somebody's Daughter Theatre—methods:

- weekly workshops inside and outside the prison
- intensive long-term arts-based program for youth at risk
- scripts generated from the authentic voice of participants
- scripts selected for school Year 12 text lists
- publication of writing by prisoners
- at least one series of public performances and art exhibitions every year
- shows inside prisons
- ex-prisoners working with rural youth at risk to 'break the cycle'
- radio, press and television coverage
- series of public workshops and discussions
- tours of city schools, rural towns, theatre spaces, etc.
- CD with songs from women in prison
- website with information for people wanting to engage the company.

sexual and physical abuse, and most have low levels of education. One project, *Bring Down the Walls*, was designed to give women inside Victorian prisons and ex-prisoners a public voice, through dance, art and music.

I think everyone does want their story to be told. They want to be heard. You are in an environment where you are powerless and no-one listens to you. Having control over your own story gives you some kind of power, some kind of control. (Project participant quoted in Osmotherly, 2002)

In another initiative, the company has increased its work with youth at risk as a strategy for tackling the social determinants of ill health, and to 'break the cycle' which ties some young people to the criminal justice system. Intergenerational projects with youth at risk in Wodonga and Albury have become a major priority within the company's current three-year plan. The youth involved are mostly contenders for juvenile justice, have been expelled from schools, and as a result find it impossible to work in a group situation.

A major achievement within this program has been the establishment of a youth theatre arm, High Water Theatre, which has produced and toured shows and art exhibitions in conjunction with Somebody's Daughter Theatre. Venues have included rural towns, Melbourne theatre spaces and Parliament House, Canberra. This initiative arose from a partnership between Somebody's Daughter Theatre, the Upper Hume Community Health Service and the Victorian Department of Education. Following an extensive assessment based on participant responses, the company wants to extend links with disadvantaged youth and to document over a three-year period the creative connection and the power of the arts to transform lives.

Outcomes of *Bring Down the Walls*: a project with women prisoners

- The skills participants learnt in the process (acting, voice work and improvisation, set/costume construction and song and script writing) developed their self-esteem.
- Participants developed trust, the ability to work in a group, strategies to deal with anger and grief, and a sense of empowerment.
- There is an exchange of understanding between prisoners and mainstream media and the general public.
- The involvement of decision-makers in projects also creates new knowledge about the reality of prisons.
- Stereotypical views of prisoners are broken down, so that policy-making can reflect a sophisticated understanding of women in the prison system.

(Based on Osmotherly, 2002)

Outcomes of youth project

Osmotherly found that the High Water Theatre initiative demonstrated the way empowerment through arts activity can be used to inspire both individual and collective action. For example, although most participants were initially forced to attend workshops, three weeks into the project all wanted to participate, and felt enabled by the experience to take control over their lives. One significant way in which they expressed this after involvement in the program was through renewed desire to find an educational framework that could benefit them.

(Osmotherly, 2002)

For further information**Website:**

www.somebodysdaughtertheatre.com

Key publications:

Osmotherly, Jan (2001), *Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company Evaluation Report*, Osfield Consultants.

Osmotherly, Jan (2002), *Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company Evaluation Report*, Osfield Consultants.

These reviews contain extensive reporting of outcomes against performance indicators, and the results of detailed surveys of participant responses.

Big hART

Big hART is a multi-artform organisation established to create art with people or groups experiencing marginalisation in a rural, regional or isolated context. The company was established in 1992 by Scott Rankin and John Bakes, and is best known to government agencies for its crime prevention work.

The first Big hART projects were in Burnie, Tasmania in 1992. The Youth Bureau of the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) gave the project funding and the Burnie City Council agreed to support the production of a manual and video and to establish the infrastructure for the future expansion into regional and mainland communities. The company's approach won National Australian Violence Prevention Awards in 1993 and 1995 for both youth crime prevention and domestic violence prevention.

Big hART projects generate new material from the raw edges of society and change structures to give this material access to national forums. (Big hART website)

There have been several projects since 1992 that target Burnie's youth—including offenders and victims of domestic violence. Big hART provides life training and self-affirming experience for project participants who have had dysfunctional experiences in systems and organisations. The collection of ideas for the activities of Big hART comes from young people's expression that surfaces in the production process. Rip and Tear Theatre, Inkwings theatre, the staff of Youth Bureau (DEETYA), Burnie Youth Access centre, the Burnie City Council and many hard working individuals are the main contributors to such projects.

At any one time, Big hART may have upwards of 15 projects under way, in locations around the country. The projects explore violence in public spaces, domestic violence, young women witnessing extreme violence, domestic violence in isolated communities, recidivism among juvenile offenders, self-harm prevention, young women with children and violence, young people and surf

Big hART: aims and objectives

The company's stated objectives are to:

- produce profound art from the experiences of disadvantaged people in regional Australia
- use the art to transform Australian culture, and present it to national forums
- provide the disadvantaged with mentorship, encouraging behavioural change and increased options.

Through such activity, Big hART aims to achieve:

- domestic violence prevention
- suicide prevention
- youth crime prevention
- re-integration of young people into regional and isolated communities.

(Big hART website)



Pin Ups

*I'd say I was twelve when I had my first kiss
My first real kiss
At school in the shelter shed.
Girls weren't allowed to talk to boys.*

*Can't remember my first kiss to be honest.
The maypole dance,
Girls plaiting ribbons.
I was only fourteen.
And then unplaiting.
He was of German extraction,
But it wasn't what you'd call a raging affair.*

*We'd play Spin The Bottle.
That game's still around today!*

*You drink, talk
Smoke, dance
Sing into broomsticks
Try to get with people
Make a fool of yourself*

*Painted their legs with Parisian essence
Drew a line with a pencil down the back of their legs*

*My pin ups were Laurence of Arabia, Chopin, and
Mathew Flinders.
And Marie Curie.*

*So you know Spin The Bottle eh?
Yeah, I know.*

Above: *Pin Ups*, from the Heaps of Rocks project, Big hART, west coast Tasmania. Photo: Christopher Saunders.

Indicators of success: Big hART

- Inter-agency cooperation occurs through an independent project that benefits mutual clients.
- Participating organisations enhance their profiles by being involved, locally and federally, with funding bodies and the media.
- Empowerment of participants: If the project is working with young homeless people, the participants would move from homeless to having a home (working with service providers) then to addressing the issue of youth homelessness in the local community, then in national forums through performance, thus providing the community with a legacy.
- The work of marginalised groups is contributed to national forums. Young people involved are taken to national forums and their work recognised.
- New work is created and access to cultural forums is restructured so that discussion of ideas and our future is inclusive.

safety, racism, juvenile justice, living in harmony, and the reintroduction of Indigenous young people to education through New Media. (Big hART website, accessed 2003)

For example, in northern NSW a number of communities are involved in film and radio programs which address addictive behaviour; meanwhile in Kalgoorlie and Boulder in WA an equivalent program is underway. In Bourke, NSW the company is running a 'Healthy Mothers Healthy Families' project; while a performance-based project is taking place with Belvoir Street Theatre in inner Sydney set in a public housing estate. The company's objective of taking shows and participants to national forums has seen it participate in the Adelaide Festival, and in documentary films made for public broadcast.

In all its projects, through community cultural development processes, the company aims to expand community resources, enabling people to mutually support one another in performing

functions of life and encouraging the rebuilding of social infrastructures.

Arts mentors work with people with destructive impulses—those with limited skills and motivation who are disengaged from the community—to help them produce work for national arts forums. The way the projects are administered encourages active cooperation from many disadvantaged communities and helps to develop a sense of community awareness through the provision of communication networks, where issues can be resolved.

The commonality in our stories means that anybody can potentially influence the way our culture emerges, providing they have the resources to produce good work and have access to forums ... It means offering an alternative structure for creating and viewing. (Big hART website)

For further information

Website:

www.acmi.net.au/bighart

Key publications:

Rankin, Scott (1996), *BIG hART, manual*, Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

Big hART outcomes

The process allows a diverse range of groups, who were previously structurally prohibited from discussion, to participate and influence decision-making and affect outcomes. The company points to further advantages of its model:

- 1) It allows disadvantaged individuals to be re-engaged in the cultural life of the community which improves the social health of both the individual and the community.
- 2) The holistic approach taken results in social, economic and cultural benefits for the entire community.
- 3) The activities to which young people contribute help to improve their emotional/mental health, family reintegration, and employment options. The work also has outcomes relating to wellbeing, including suicide prevention, crime prevention and vocational training.
- 4) The mentorship and advocacy presented in the activities helps to improve health by promoting behavioural change and providing increased options for the disadvantaged.
- 5) People who are neglected by and disengaged from society can cease anti-social behaviour and be again connected with the community.

(Rankin, 1996)

The Artful Dodgers Studio

This studio, based at a welfare agency in Collingwood, in inner city Melbourne, is run by Jesuit Social Services as an intervention strategy for young people at high risk, primarily with a dual diagnosis of substance abuse and mental health issues. Significant support has been provided by the William Buckland Foundation and VicHealth. The central element of the program is the engagement of participants as *artists not clients*, and the philosophy that rather than regarding art as therapy, the program uses art to ‘be with’ participants.

The Studio therefore provides a ‘safe haven’ for participants, acting as the vehicle for exploration of the relationship between isolated individuals, a supportive community and a world of possibilities (Marsden and Thiele, 2000). The playing out of such a relationship over an extended timeframe (participants remain involved over months and even years), seems to create the trust necessary for making change.

The following extract is reproduced from an analysis of The Artful Dodgers Studio by Martin Thiele and Sally Marsden:

In 1996 Jesuit Social Services established The Artful Dodgers Studio as part of its Connexions program, a new and innovative multidisciplinary program established to engage with and provide specialist services to young men and women with complex needs, specifically, young people with a dual diagnosis of substance use and mental health issues.

Sally Marsden, an experienced community cultural development artist practitioner, was employed to coordinate the studio-based program. Following a six-month research and development period, she employed sessional artist practitioners for short-term projects and established the long-term program. The Studio was designed as a sustained-engagement model specifically for young people who are extremely fragile and marginalised ...

From a health professional’s perspective ‘dual diagnosis’ refers to people who are experiencing concurrent mental illness (including depression, psychosis, drug-induced psychosis, bi-polar disorder and schizophrenia) and substance misuse (typically, amphetamines, alcohol, heroin, marijuana and prescription medications).

The Artful Dodgers Studio is a central feature of the Connexions program, providing a safe and secure environment for young people to explore the arts. It provides an alternative strategy for engaging young people and enables them to give expression to their experience of marginalization through artistic projects. A contributing factor to the

program's success is the location of the Studio within a welfare program, enabling participants to develop relationships of trust with youth workers and counsellors and refer to them as the need arises.

Typically the Studio participants experience a high incidence of homelessness and disengagement from family, school and other 'community' institutions. It is not unusual for participants to exhibit high-risk behaviours such as prostitution, offending, intravenous drug use, needle sharing, suicide attempts, and other forms of self-harm, including unsafe sex and binge drinking.

Over time the Studio has developed into a fully functioning visual arts workspace, designed around an open access studio model. At any one time, as many as eleven young people are working on individual art pieces or group projects. Adjacent to the Studio is a working kitchen where meals are prepared on designated days by one of the artist practitioners. The Studio employs one full-time community cultural development artist practitioner with visual arts specialization, one part-time artist practitioner and sessional artists for specific projects ...

Jesuit Social Services has looked at participant progress as part of its ongoing evaluation of programs ... Figures suggest that by engaging with the program participants learn to manage their mental health, substance use and other problems. This enables them to begin to develop significant relationships and engage with the community, in particular through returning to education and/or employment, thereby reducing their social exclusion.

We need to be cautious about analysing and interpreting the data because there are multiple factors at play (especially in relation to dual diagnosis); however, the statistics presented here represent a preliminary overview which shows changes in mental health status, substance use and education/employment. Future research will enable us to identify the multiple factors involved and to better understand the significance of these in relation to the participants' journey through the program.

(Thiele and Marsden, 2003)

The Artful Dodgers Studio: achievements

Extract from *Engaging Art*:

By examining Studio participation data over a four-year period ending in 2001, the following trends have been identified:

- 1) **Substance use** – on entry to the program, only 6% of participants reported not misusing drugs and/or alcohol. This picture changed drastically, with 36% of participants reporting not using any substances on exit from the program. Further, on entry to the program 76% of participants reported abusing depressants such as alcohol, heroin and prescription drugs, while on exit this figure had dropped to 37%.
- 2) **Mental health** – there was an overall reduction in reported levels of anxiety, depression, and self-harm, as well as a small reduction in the number of psychotic episodes experienced by some participants.
- 3) **Education/employment** – almost all of the participants who came to the program had disconnected from formal education and/or employment; however, on exit 18% of participants entered some form of employment and 21% returned to formal education (such as CAE, VCE, TAFE and university).

(Thiele and Marsden, 2003)

For further information

Website:

www.jss.org.au

Key publications:

Marsden, Sally and Thiele, Martin (2000), *Risking Art; Art for Survival: Outlining the role of the arts in services to marginalised young people*, Jesuit Social Services, Melbourne.

This is published by Jesuit Social Services, with 5000 copies already distributed. It provides a theoretical framework with analysis of 12 examples of programs which combine the arts with services for marginalised young people.

Thiele, Martin and Marsden, Sally (2003), *Engaging Art: The Artful Dodgers Studio: A Theoretical Model of Practice*, Jesuit Social Services, Melbourne.

This follow-up book explores the Artful Dodgers Studio in considerable detail, presenting case study material, and offering a model of ethical practice and evaluation.