

2 Making a Difference

Mwerre Anthurre

A professional art program accessing mainstream markets and creating new employment opportunities for users of Bindi Inc, a supported employment service in Alice Springs.

Arts Roar

A group of artists with disabilities who are changing the landscape of arts activities in Launceston.

EASE Ticketing

A specialised ticket-booking and access advocacy service located with Arts Access Victoria, enabling people with a disability to attend cultural events since 1987.

Accessing the Arts

Arts and cultural events program to celebrate International Day of People with a Disability, offered by participating organisations across New South Wales and coordinated by Accessible Arts NSW. This chapter focuses on events in Nymagee and at the Bunker Cartoon Gallery.



Aileen Oliver Ampetyane and Cathy Peckham with their artwork. Photograph by Mark Miller, Department of Family and Community Services. This image is reproduced with permission. © Commonwealth of Australia 2004.

Mwerre Anthurre

A very proper art studio

Introduction

Mwerre Anthurre ('very good' or 'very proper') is a professional, studio-based art program located at Bindi Inc in Alice Springs. Bindi offers supported employment, adult training and assistance to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It is a not-for-profit, cross-cultural service funded primarily by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). Bindi initially established the art program in response to the particular needs and interests of Indigenous people who use the service. Mwerre Anthurre artists participate in mainstream exhibitions and sell their work through national art galleries.

Seeking mainstream recognition for artists with an intellectual disability and supporting their work in a studio setting has an important precedent in Australia. Arts Project Australia (APA), located in Melbourne, has been exhibiting work since 1974, and in 1982 established a workshop studio which employs professional artists and provides quality art materials. For decades it has recognised the capacity of people with an intellectual disability to make art, and their right to mainstream recognition and an income for their work.

The story of Mwerre Anthurre

Apmere atyinhe Artetyerre, Agkerrepe uthene, Alyawarre antekerrepenhe Arrernte ikngerripenhe uthene. Apmere



Billy Benn Perrurle at work in the studio. Photograph by Peter Eve / Newspix.

atyinhe antenhe. Apmere atyinhe antenhe aknganentye intelhentye-arlke. Atyinhe altharte aknganentye alheke Alcupa-werne, ampere arrpenhe mapekenhewerne, ayerrere alturle Angkerrepe-ngentyele.

My country is Harts Range, Utopia, South and East Arrente. My country, painting. My country is dreaming antenhe [possum]. My dreaming, corroboree. My dreaming goes to Alcupa, to another people's country, north-west from Utopia.

BILLY BENN PERRURLE, ALYAWARRE LANGUAGE GROUP

Perrurle's central Australian landscapes possess a depth and serenity that resonate this relationship to country as the motivation and core significance of the work. Perrurle has emerged to be recognised as an artist of importance and integrity. He is represented in key national collections.

KAREN BROWN GALLERY,
PRESS RELEASE, 2003

For over 20 years, Billy Benn Perrurle was employed as a sheet metal worker with Bindi. While he made metal boxes for his work, he was also a practising artist. A space in the metal workshop was his painting corner, and any available flat surfaces, particularly old boards discarded by the Alice Springs timber mill, were his canvases. His tools and materials were those that were most accessible – fingers,

cloth, glue and paint. He often sold his work for the price of a cool drink. There was one occasion before 2000 when his paintings were exhibited. *Beyond Passions*, an exhibition held in Alice Springs, showcased artworks by people with a disability. Billy Benn's work sold out.

In 2000, Alison Brash, then Program Manager at Bindi, took up the issues that Billy Benn's determined and powerful work presented: the need for culturally appropriate employment in a context like Bindi and, with 75% of Australian art market sales attributed to Indigenous artists, the importance of locating it in a professional framework. With the help of the Indigenous arts marketing organisation Desert Inc, she established Bindi's professional arts development program.

The first artists involved in the program were Billy Benn, Seth Namatjira and Aileen Oliver Ampetyane. They decided to name their studio Mwerre Anthurre, an Arrrente phrase meaning 'very good' or 'very proper'. It is also known as Bindi Centa Arts.

The founding artists were introduced as 'Bindi artists' at the annual Desert Mob exhibition in 2000. Over the next two years they worked in an area created for them in the Bindi Centa storeroom, and their work was sold from the Bindi showroom alongside other Bindi products. National gallery owners and curators were amongst the purchasers. In 2002,



Billy Benn Perrurle, *Harts Range* (detail). Acrylic on plywood, 43 x 17.5 cm, 2003. Photograph by Neridah Stockley, Bindi Inc.



Billy Benn Perrurle, *Harts Range, My Country* (detail). Acrylic on linen, 240 x 53 cm. Photograph by Lisa Molloy, Bindi Inc.



Seth Namatjira, *Untitled* (detail). Acrylic on board, 45.5 x 12.5 cm. Photograph by Neridah Stockley, Bindi Inc.

federal funding was secured to support the employment of ten artists, renovate the existing space as a working studio and employ an Art Coordinator.

Bindi people, Bindi art

[How did you become an artist?]

Awenhe mape, altyele mape, yaye mape aremle.

By watching my aunties, cousins and sisters.

[Where do you get your ideas from?]

Itelaremle. Anwerne ulyenye alhermele. Ayenge intelhe-iletyeke ahentye anemele apetyeme.

By memorising. When we go out bush. I like coming in for painting.

AILEEN OLIVER AMPETYANE, EASTERN ARRENTE LANGUAGE GROUP

About ten artists regularly come to the Bindi studio for between three and 14 hours per week. Remote community members who come to Alice Springs for respite also access the studio while they are in town. The age range of the artists is from 18 to 63 years. Their first languages are diverse and include Central and Eastern Arrente, Alyawarre, Anmathere, Pintupi, Warlpiri, Pitjintjajara, Ngaanyatjarra, Yankunytjatjara and English.

Landscape is the predominant subject matter of the artists' work and often

reflects country of cultural significance. Some artists continue a style learned from family members in their community. For some, Mwerre Anthurre is their first opportunity to paint. Whatever their subject matter, the artists bring diverse and distinct ways of seeing to it.

In the first group show at the Karen Brown Gallery in Darwin in 2003, the artists who exhibited were Billy Benn Perrurle, Seth Namatjira, Aileen Oliver Ampetyane, Randal Dickson and Sandra Darlene White. Their work included interpretations of colour and light in the Central Australian landscape, the representation of places such as St Teresa Church, portraiture and studies of horses. Writing in *The Australian* about the second Karen Brown show in 2004, Nicholas Rothwell also highlighted the work of other artists in the show:

18-year-old Kukula Macdonald, a Warlpiri artist from Papunya, who paints only black cockatoos or wheelchairs, and Adrian Robinson, from Yuendumu, a painter whose mountain landscapes in false colour carry a disconcerting emotional charge.

NICHOLAS ROTHWELL, 'BARRIERS GIVEN THE BRUSH', *The Australian*, 26 March 2004, p. 17

While Mwerre Anthurre is the main focus of the Bindi arts program, Bindi has also run the Ti-Tree program to support artists with disabilities in the more remote parts of the 800-kilometre area the service covers. The intention is to help people stay in their own country to paint by providing them with materials and professional contact. The Ti-Tree program connected with about 16 outstations that are up to 50 kilometres away from each other and up to 200 kilometres north of Alice Springs. A coordinator was employed to work with the communities on a part-time basis and fluctuating numbers of artists were involved.

**Ngujunya yirdiji KuKula manu Ngajuju
Papunya-wardingki. Nguju-nyanyi Warrki.
Ngaju Karna ngapurrpa nyina manijaku
yardiwajiki yina yirrarni Kuruwarrki
maruku lapaji. Warru mani larnarlu
yalyu-yalyu pinkirra Nganyukirli Colini-
kirli manu Tonyi-kirli Manu Carli-kirli.
Ngapurrpa-nyanyi karna nyina yungurna
Nguju-mani ngami yalyu-yalyu pinkirra
Kurlu. Yungurna yani ngampurrpa yani
Docker-Kurra.**

**My name is Kukula and I am from Papunya.
Nice hard work. I like to take photos for
paintings of black cockatoos. I collect red
feathers with Colin and Tony and Carl. I
like to do baskets with red feathers.**

KUKULA MACDONALD, WARLPIRI
LANGUAGE GROUP



Adrian Robinson Jangala *Untitled* (detail). Acrylic on board, 43.5 x 24.5 cm. Photograph by Neridah Stockley, Bindi Inc.



The Bindi art studio. Photograph by Neridah Stockley, Bindi Inc.

Managing and marketing

Mwerre Anthurre receives funding from FaCS on the basis of its certification as a business service. As a professional arts centre, it operates on a collective principle. This means that after deduction of the gallery consignment from the sale of a painting, a proportion of the figure remains with Mwerre Anthurre to cover the cost of administration and purchase of materials, while the remainder is income for the artist. This practice ensures income to foster and support new artists.

The work of Mwerre Anthurre artists is sold through Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi (Melbourne), Gallery Gondwana (Alice Springs), Alcaston Gallery (Melbourne) and Karen Brown Gallery (Darwin). As the artists do not create the same amount of work as other artists working through Indigenous arts centres, once federal funding for the program was secured, the decision was made to cease sales from the Bindi showroom and concentrate on exhibitions and marketing through mainstream galleries.

Conclusion

Mwerre Anthurre is as much about quality of life and the process of creating art as the finished work and income generation. It is also a professional art program with a national market and growing recognition. Giving equal focus to these intentions, as well as encouraging the participation of people with high

support needs, is an enormous challenge.

Funding which is tied to productivity is an inevitable issue. Mwerre Anthurre is looking at changing from a business service to a supported employment service that will allow current participants to remain in the program. FaCS' interest in services moving to case-based funding – that is, funding based on the needs of each individual in the program – is another challenge the studio will need to respond to.

The Ti-Tree outreach program is an important feature in the context of remote Central Australia. Developing and maintaining it has included dealing with the high turnover of coordinators, the fluidity of community life and the differences between communities. The Ti-Tree program has not been run since 2003. A first step for consideration in its future management is the development of partnerships with other agencies who have contact with the communities.

The obvious achievements of Mwerre Anthurre owe much to the vision and skills of individual workers and the supportive work environment they provide. Recruitment and retention of skilled staff and the impact of staff turnover on program continuity is a common difficulty in regional and remote areas, especially where an organisation has few staff. Bindi Centa Arts is committed to the arts program and its continuing success as the only organisation of its type in Central Australia.

Arts Roar

The loudest voices get heard

Introduction

What do you do if you want to go somewhere that is just not accessible for a wheelchair? How do you make yourself heard when people consistently direct their attention elsewhere? Launceston's Arts Roar is an organisation interested in these and many more issues relevant to people with a disability. By supporting highly visible, quality artwork by artists with a disability, the organisation highlights both the creative capacity of the artists and the day-to-day issues they face. Since 2002 it has developed a number of projects with artists with disabilities.

A committee of Arts Roar participants is the heart of Arts Roar. Projects grow out of their interests, take up their concerns, provide them with opportunities to develop their skills and enable them to engage in integrated activities.

I did this project because I wanted to tell people about access issues in Launceston.

GERARD SMITH, PARTICIPANT, NO ACCESS FOR ME

Arts Roar has given me more opportunities. I have been involved in directing another video and want to do more.

EMMA BUTLER, PARTICIPANT, WHO DO YOU SUPPORT? (AND ARTS ROAR SECRETARY)



Gerard Smith, Arts Roar committee member, with the 'No Access For Me' cards he designed for distribution to inaccessible establishments. Photograph by Neil Richardson, *The Examiner*.

The projects

No Access for Me

Arts Roar conducts regular access checks of businesses in Launceston, giving out red or green access cards and providing the business with an access report. A number of businesses have responded to the request for better access.

I got some of the doors and entrances at Respite widened.

SCOTT CLARIDGE, PARTICIPANT

I want to be able to access things ... like a cup of coffee. The No Access for Me campaign helps me let people know this.

KEES DE JONG, PARTICIPANT

No Access for Me was funded by the Launceston City Council's Access Committee and created as part of Arts Roar's involvement in a project called Safe as Houses. Safe as Houses was initiated by the Women's Health Service and supported by other services assisting women with an intellectual disability living independently in Launceston.

Who Do You Support?

Another outcome of Arts Roar's involvement with Safe as Houses was a video, *Who Do You Support?*, written and directed by Arts Roar participant and secretary, Emma Butler. The video is a training resource for support workers made from the point of view of their

clients. Issues of concern are examined through interviews and scenarios based on situations that Emma herself has faced.

All workers need to be reminded who they are working for and this video does that. I thought it was excellent. It challenges workers' values and attitudes about the people they work for.

NELLA DAVIS, DISABILITY SERVICES,
TASMANIAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES

Who Do You Support? continues to sell well across Australia, with Emma Butler responsible for its marketing and distribution. She was awarded a Tasmanian Young Achiever of the Year Award for Community Service in 2004.

Visionary Images

Visionary Images was a collaboration between community cultural development artist, Maria Fillipow, Arts Roar participants and graphic design students at Launceston TAFE. Together they created powerful black-and-white images about bullying which were featured on the back of buses, on posters and on postcards. Images from the project have been exhibited in Launceston galleries, displayed on banners, used in student workshops on bullying and in arts and access promotional material.



In the Visionary Images project Arts Roar participant Kylie Hingston worked with TAFE graphic design students to create images of bullying and difference. This is one of her designs.



Another collaborative result of the Visionary Images project.



Participants in the Unstuck Films project produced four short films which were featured in a number of festivals. Photograph by Paul Scambler, *The Examiner*.

This project was important because it was letting people know that we were trying to do something about bullying. When I was at school there wasn't anything done about it.

PAUL SMITH, PARTICIPANT

Unstuck Films

Unstuck Films was an early project that had a huge impact on everyone involved.

Doing this project was very big ... like a big wave coming over me. But then I realised that I had to make myself bigger than the wave.

HEATHER STYLES, PARTICIPANT

The intention was to undo the convention that if people with an intellectual disability are involved in film, they are directed by an 'able-bodied' crew. The Arts Roar participants were the crew and three 'able-bodied' people were the performers. Working with visiting film-maker Rick Randall, the Arts Roar crew wrote, filmed and directed four short films on location at Inveresk railyards.

Other projects

Arts Roar participants took a prominent part in Launceston's biannual youth arts festival, Streets Alive, in 2003. It was an opportunity for involvement in a mainstream arts event, meeting other people, furthering ideas and interests and just having a great time.

I liked acting like a policeman. The little kids liked that. I enjoyed being involved because there were so many people. I enjoyed being part of a crowd.

KEES DE JONG, PARTICIPANT

Arts Roar participants have also recently participated in an Internet project, Netconnect. This has enabled isolated young people in Tasmania's north and north-east to collaborate and exchange digital film, photography, poetry and visual art with other young people nationally and internationally in Spain, Egypt and New York.

Other Arts Roar projects include exhibitions featuring emerging artists and the design of a labyrinth in a local park. Arts Roar participants have worked with young people from Launceston's sister city in China to digitise art onto tiles for the public art installation that is part of 'The Labyrinth'.

Making it happen

The Arts Roar Committee has come a long way. We have had a lot of positive outcomes and we can have more if we keep it going.

EMMA BUTLER, SECRETARY, ARTS ROAR

Arts Roar was initiated by two members of Interweave Arts Association (an incorporated body of colleagues committed to community arts), Jenni Sharman and Mara Schneiders. They recognised the need for accessible



Jenni Sharman and Emma Butler at the launch of the Safe As Houses project. Photograph by Tim Hughes (*The Examiner*).



Arts Roar: BACK, from left: Chris van Essen, Jenni Sharman, Kees de Jong and Scott Claridge. FRONT: Gerard Smith, Emma Butler and Paul Smith. Photograph by Neil Richardson (*The Examiner*).

arts opportunities in Launceston, and made contact with both established accessible arts organisations and potential participants. Potential participants were identified through referrals from various local disability support services and through personal contacts established through Jenni Sharman's long-term involvement in the disability field as a support worker and educator. A simple questionnaire about preferred art experiences, transport issues and disability needs led to plans for projects that would fulfil these interests. When funding was received, Jenni became the Arts Roar coordinator.

Arts Roar operates on project funding received from local, state and Commonwealth arts and community bodies and comes under the auspices of Interweave. Strong, supportive partnerships with arts organisations, local government and disability support organisations mean that a number of Arts Roar activities are funded by other community groups who apply for money to work with Arts Roar on particular projects.

Arts Roar projects are managed by Jenni Sharman and the Arts Roar committee. The committee was formed by Emma Butler in April 2003 and has a strong core of young people with a physical disability. Committee members meet once a month to discuss projects, update everyone on developments and plan future activities.

They play a critical role in shaping and directing Arts Roar.

Committee members also work with other groups who are advocates for the rights of people with a disability, such as Arts Action, a state-wide arts and disability organisation for Tasmania.

Conclusion

Arts Roar has begun to address the recognised accessible arts gap in services for people with disabilities in Launceston. It has so far operated on a project-to-project basis with a coordinator who operates from home. An active, participant-driven Arts Roar committee offers a sound basis for developing a more sustainable form of management. The ultimate aim of Arts Roar is that the organisation is owned and driven by people with disabilities who have resources to coordinate their own activities.

The provision of laptop computers with voice command and Internet access has been vital to Arts Roar. It has enabled participants to have fuller involvement in statewide advocacy and greater access to the world. In the future, Arts Roar hopes to look globally as well as locally, increasing cultural participation and opportunities for people with disabilities around the world.

Note: Some of the information on Arts Roar projects has been sourced from the article 'Roar energy' in The Sunday Examiner Magazine, 7 December 2003.

EASE Ticketing

A good night out

Introduction

EASE is a longstanding subscription ticketing service for people with disabilities run by Arts Access Victoria. It has about 600 individual and group members, and several thousand people use the service. They include individuals with physical, sensory, intellectual and psychiatric disabilities, as well as those with life-threatening illnesses and learning disabilities. Organisations such as supported residential services have also taken up membership, enabling the service to reach people who are homeless, in rehabilitation or in need of support due to domestic violence or substance abuse.

The EASE service

We subscribe to EASE because my daughter, who has cerebral palsy, absolutely loves the theatre. Belonging to EASE means we have the opportunity to attend the theatre at a reasonable price. It also gives me (the mum) the sense of inclusion and community, and a feeling that our needs are just as important as any other family's.

NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST

EASE makes it possible for many people, who would not otherwise have the opportunity, to attend arts and entertainment events. It provides information about venue accessibility and ensures that those who book with EASE get the most suitable seat for their



EASE provides tickets and information to accessible events.



EASE staff in the office, 2005: Fiona Hanrahan and Jenny Penhall.

needs. It handles all the arrangements of ticket booking and designates a suitable location for collecting tickets at the venue. It also books seats for friends and family members who don't have a disability.

Information about access and upcoming events is provided to EASE subscribers via the quarterly *EASE Update* and a telephone service. The *Update* is produced in multiple formats including audio tape, braille, large print and email. This means, for instance, that subscribers can respond using the speech access function on their computers.

EASE recognises the financial disadvantage suffered by people with disabilities who may be underemployed, incur extra costs in attending events and have limited seating choices. It provides flexible booking and payment options, organises reduced-price offers and distributes free tickets to disadvantaged groups. A number of organisations use EASE because it enables their members and participants to go to otherwise financially inaccessible events.

I work in a Community Health Centre, servicing clients with disabilities, socially and economically disadvantaged clients, etc. We have been privileged to access free and cheap tickets on many occasions, however one springs to mind as a real winner. It was the final night of *The Mikado*, starring Jon English. We were offered a load of tickets for \$2

each. We were able to send our Young Mothers Support Group along with other families who would never have an opportunity to experience the theatre.

SUE BEENCK, BANYULE COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICE

EASE's wide experience with access issues has enabled it to establish a variety of advocacy and training activities. Access advice and training in the areas of disability awareness, equal opportunity and Disability Action Plans are provided to venues by EASE staff on a fee-for-service basis.

EASE's role as an advocate has also led to partnerships with agencies with similar interests. In association with Vision Australia and VicDeaf, the service negotiates with producers and organises the provision of audio description, signed interpretation and pre-show tactile (touch) tours to introduce people with a vision impairment to the venue environment, including seating and the stage set. EASE's work in the partnership also includes managing all the arrangements, booking and helping train the interpreters, promoting the event and selling the tickets.

In encouraging people to get along to a good night out, EASE promotes a wide range of entertainment and facilitates more than 20,000 attendances at cultural events each year. In this audience development capacity, EASE has also worked to demonstrate that people with

disabilities are a valuable market for arts organisations. It argues that selling a discounted ticket to this audience adds to overall revenue as it does not undercut existing audiences.

The distribution of free tickets ('papering') is another service EASE offers which assists arts organisations in getting a full house. This often provides people with their first arts experience, and the arts organisation gains some kudos for cultural inclusion.

Vision and management

Many years ago, probably in the early 1990s, EASE coordinator Dean Michael asked me to participate with him in a disability access audit of the [Melbourne] Arts Centre's entertainment venues ... Perhaps the current good access at the Fairfax arose from that day? And finally this year wheelchair seating in the Concert Hall moved from the passageway behind the stalls to the back row, amongst other back row patrons. Slowly the wheels turn.

HILARY ASH, EASE MEMBER

EASE, initially named Entertainment Access Service, was established by Arts Access in Victoria in 1987. At this time the major ticket agencies were becoming more automated and corporatised. Much of the existing advocacy in the arts for people with disabilities concerned participation rather than attendance. EASE took



Auslan interpreters at the Melbourne International Arts Festival. Photograph by Catherine Acin.



The Arts Centre in Melbourne. EASE offers a specialised seating service for all performances at the Arts Centre. Photograph courtesy of the Arts Centre.

up the issue of attendance with one coordinator, a phone and a photocopier. In 2005, 17 years on, it has doubled in size – employing two people instead of one – and makes extensive use of new technologies. Developments such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 have also impacted on its work and extended its lobbying, advocacy and training activities.

Part of EASE's income is derived from memberships and ticket sales. Individual and organisational members pay an annual subscription of between \$25 and \$55. A small fee (much smaller than that of the major agencies) is collected on paid tickets. The combined income of membership and fees covers the cost of one staff member. Another staff salary and all running costs come through government grants to Arts Access which continues to manage EASE. Any income from training that EASE provides goes into the program to update materials and to provide staff with professional development.

EASE keeps in touch with its members through regular surveys. All feedback received via phone, email or post is documented. An annual focus group forum with interested EASE members allows for more refined feedback on which events people prefer to see. It also seeks members' thoughts about directions and partnerships. A further benefit of the

forum is that it is an effective method of informing EASE members of their rights under the Disability Discrimination Act and encouraging them to become advocates themselves.

Long-term goals

EASE's unique service, combining ticketing with information on venue access and a welcoming attitude, has had an important impact on access to arts and entertainment events for people with a disability. Nevertheless, it remains the case that people with a disability are much less likely to go to arts and entertainment events than the rest of the population. Structural access, from transport and parking to walkways and seating, is often limited or highly restrictive. The internal environment may have problems such as noise and glare. Appropriate toilets may not be available and it is likely that services such as sign interpretation and audio description are not provided. Venue marketing rarely provides information about access or uses alternate formats for information about programmes, ticket prices and booking arrangements.

These continuing problems will only be addressed when mainstream ticketing services take up the EASE model and when the presenters, producers and major ticket agencies take on their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act. This has always been EASE's long-term goal – to reach the point when there is no



EASE members can access Melbourne Symphony Orchestra events at a reduced price. Photograph by Mark Wilson.



The Sapphires, Melbourne Theatre Company, 2005. Performances by the Melbourne Theatre Company are accessible to EASE members. Photograph by Jeff Busby.

longer a need for a separate 'ghettoised' ticket service. Now there are signs that, in the future, there may not be a need for EASE in its current form. For instance, the Victorian Department of Human Services has recently introduced a service that overlaps with EASE's provision for companions of people with a disability. A Companion Card is available for people with a disability on the basis that charging a companion or carer for a ticket to accompany a person with a disability would be discriminatory.

Conclusion

EASE highlights the way it is possible to increase mainstream audiences while attracting new niche markets. In an improved climate of access, EASE could become a provider of expert advice to mainstream commercial ticketing agencies and arts organisations who handle their own box offices. There are few, if any, services in Australia with EASE's contacts and expertise in access issues. Its national and international networks allow staff to have up-to-date information about new programs, access solutions and services. On this basis, it may have the potential to attract commercial sponsorship and offer its services on a new footing in the future.

I would like to let you know about my recent experience of attending the *Pearl Fishers* opera. My friend (who also has a disability) and I obtained front row seats and could not have attended without the discounted price of the tickets. We obtained these tickets because Bear In Mind is a subscriber to EASE/Arts Access. My friend was so happy to be there [and] I was enjoying watching her being happy.

LYN, BEAR IN MIND (A SUPPORT GROUP FOR PEOPLE WITH ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY)

Accessing the Arts

Music at Nymagee, cartoons at Coffs

Introduction

December 3rd is designated as International Day of People with a Disability, known familiarly as 'International Day'. Since 2002, Accessible Arts NSW has organised a program of cultural events to celebrate the day. Accessing the Arts, as the program is called, encourages organisations to participate by offering an accessible activity that celebrates ability. The aim is that these one-off celebratory activities will provide a basis for the organisation to take up a long-term approach to access issues as part of their wider activities.

The participation of over 20 organisations in the first year of Accessing the Arts set a strong precedent for developing it further. Subsequent years have focused on encouraging particular participants – in 2003, regional organisations, and in 2004, Indigenous and multicultural communities.

The coordination and promotion of Accessing the Arts events is funded by the New South Wales Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC). Accessible Arts coordinates six-weekly meetings with all participants, and provides training, expert advice and assistance with planning events.

Participating organisations hold events that variously offer access opportunities, feature the work of artists with a disability and encourage hands-on involvement of people with a disability in arts activities.



Yvonne Harland and Brad Wynd perform at the International Day festivities at Nymagee, 2003. Photograph by Jay Dunne.



Caitlin Lehmann, Anita Lehmann and Cecil Howlett perform at the International Day festivities at Nymagee, 2003. A mix of amateur and professional performers were involved. Photograph by Jay Dunne.

Some use it as an opportunity to launch access guides and discuss and recommend approaches to access.

Two small arts organisations that have made an important difference in their local communities by participating in Accessing the Arts are the Nymagee Outback Music Festival and the Bunker Cartoon Gallery.

Nymagee Outback Music Festival Committee – performance and exhibition

On 'International Day' in 2003, around 120 people gathered at the Nymagee pub for a night of music, an art exhibition by local identity Sqwark, and a feast put on by the Nymagee Outback Music Festival committee. For most, it involved travelling considerable distances on dirt roads and, for those from nearby towns, round trips of over 300 kilometres were common.

Nymagee is a remote rural village and wider district with a 70-100 kilometre radius. Its name means 'small plain surrounded by hills' – a distinct landscape in the predominantly flat environment of western New South Wales. As a result of the recent drought, the population of the village has shrunk from 65 to 35 in a total district population of about 150. The Nymagee school, an important focus for community life, closed in 2002. The village now operates around a hotel and a police station.

There was a need for something to happen. Due to the drought morale is

low, local people can't afford to go far and celebration and entertainment are needed.

JAY DUNNE, COORDINATOR, NYMAGEE OUTBACK MUSIC FESTIVAL

Nymagee's event for International Day took place with the support of the Mallee Hen Co-operation Ltd, a local initiative to encourage arts, culture, tourism and community services in the district which supports the Nymagee Outback Music Festival held every two years in October, and the Outback Music Festival committee. Further support came from the Gymkhana committee, the Nymagee Metropolitan Hotel and the Country Women's Association.

Jay Dunne organised the Nymagee event in her capacity as coordinator of the Nymagee Outback Music Festival. As well as attracting over 100 local, interstate and international artists and over 1000 visitors, the Festival is an inclusive community event. Jay's approach to organising both the Festival and the International Day event is an integrated one, building awareness by highlighting people with a disability within the general scheme of things and without making 'too much fuss'. The International Day event started at 6 pm, with performance stages both inside and outside the pub to cater for an audience with diverse interests and a number of keen performers whose work ranged across a variety of styles.



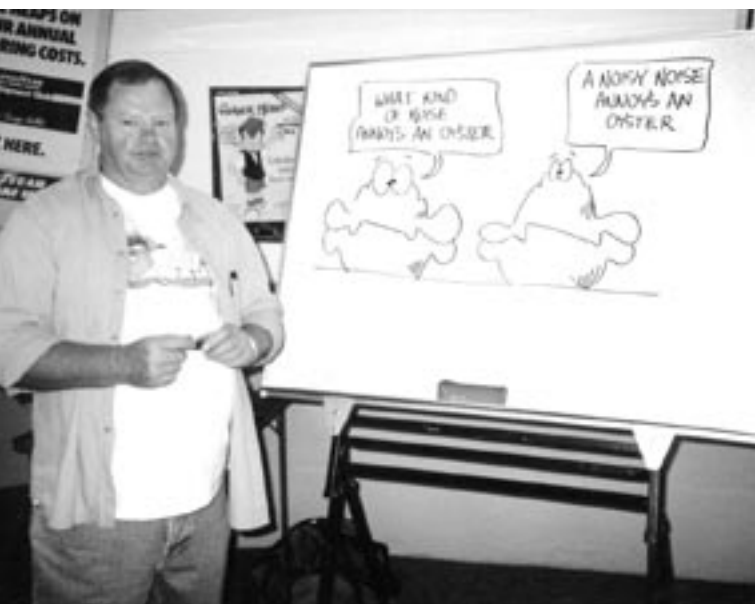
Artwork exhibited by Sqwark for International Day at Nymagee, 2003. Photograph by Jay Dunne.



Music along the red dirt road: the Nymagee Outback Music Festival 2004 ticket booth. Photograph by Jay Dunne.



One of the works by cartoonist Cathy Wilcox exhibited as part of International Day in Coffs Harbour.



Richard Jones conducting a cartooning workshop for International Day celebrations in Coffs Harbour. Photograph by Margaret Bridgeman.

A number of local musicians performed, including those with a disability. Established musicians such as Tonchi McIntosh, born in Bourke and now performing professionally in Melbourne, performed on the night, as did artists new to performance. Original work was part of the mixture of folk, country, rock, jazz and stand-up comedy.

Lots of talk amongst the community for weeks afterwards and obvious raised spirits in general. Also gave the 'disabled' people more confidence with the recognition and respect for what they can do well.

JAY DUNNE

Since the gig in December 2003, there have been more frequent performances by visiting and local artists at the pub. There are hopes that a regular event on International Day in future years will double as a community Christmas celebration.

Bunker Cartoon Gallery – workshops and exhibition

Coffs Harbour's Bunker Cartoon Gallery is Australia's only dedicated gallery for black and white cartoons. It features cartoons chosen from the Coffs Cartoon Collection – a project of Coffs Harbour Rotary Club – and holds original drawings by leading cartoonists from Australia and around the world. It is housed in a heritage-listed underground bunker built during World War II. Exhibitions are themed and change

every three months. The Gallery plays an active part in community life and has participated in International Day since 2002.

As we are located in a small rural area, opportunities that were provided by this day do not occur often, particularly with the help of professional staff and the opportunity to have work shown in a public gallery.

ROBYNNE MCGINLEY, SERVICE DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, NAMBUCCA VALLEY PHOENIX EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Bunker's 2002 event featured an exhibition of cartoons by employees of Nambucca Valley Phoenix ('Phoenix') and the cartoonist Cathy Wilcox under the banner *A Celebration of Ability*. Phoenix is an employer of people with an intellectual disability and is funded by the Department of Family and Community Services. Its training program includes an art group, and there is a studio and exhibition space on its site. Phoenix employees had been part of community exhibitions in Taree, and the Bunker event offered a new exhibition opportunity for them. Cathy Wilcox's cartoons have appeared in many Australian newspapers and she is a regular contributor to the Coffs Rotary Cartoon Awards. For the 2002 event, she gave permission for Bunker to exhibit her series of drawings focusing on people with disabilities.

In association with the exhibition, Bunker organised funding for cartoonist Richard Jones to conduct workshops. A number of



Count Kangula, a cartoon produced from the International Day workshop with Richard Jones, by Garrett Beisler.



One of the works by cartoonist Cathy Wilcox exhibited as part of International Day in Coffs Harbour.

local people with a disability, as well as Phoenix employees, participated in the workshops.

As a result of their involvement in the workshops, three young people from Phoenix became volunteers at Bunker. Two have since secured part-time paid employment.

I started [at Bunker] in February 2003 ... I was at the Gallery until December 2003 when I got a job three days a week with the BASE Warehouse furniture store in town. It was the skills I learnt at the Gallery and the good reference that got me the job.

SANDY BOOTH-CONRAN, BUNKER
VOLUNTEER

For the Gallery, *A Celebration of Ability* was a huge success. The Gallery Director at that time, Margaret Bridgman, reflected on the 'fulfilling challenge' it offered everyone involved – the participants, organisers and workshop leaders – and its value as an opportunity to introduce a new audience to Bunker. Her report also shows the excitement and pleasure the workshop and exhibition generated.

In 2003, Bunker staff built on the new connections made in the previous year and became more involved with the local International Day committee. There were more sales from the exhibition and more participants at the workshops. Richard Jones returned as a workshop

presenter, with praise for his rapport with participants. Robynne McGinley from Phoenix commented on how inspiring it was for a particular participant – who had contributed to local public artwork and was keen to become a cartoonist – to meet Richard and learn from him.

Two important outcomes of the 2003 event for Phoenix were that participants sold work and new people from the Coffs Harbour area found out about Phoenix's studio and gallery. This connection between Bunker and the International Day committee continued into future events.

Conclusion

The Nymagee Outback Music Festival and Bunker Cartoon Gallery events both show the longer term impact of participating in a low-cost, small-scale, single activity. In Nymagee an event near Christmas to celebrate ability was the opportunity for reinvigoration of the overall spirit of a small remote community. Bunker's involvement in 2002 was the beginning of an ongoing relationship with the local disability community which continues to have an impact on the Gallery's activities.

The Accessing the Arts program itself has achieved such success since 2002 that the New South Wales Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care is increasingly playing a role in funding and coordinating International Day events.