

NAKED PRACTICE



OUTCOMES OF TWO COMMUNITY ARTS
PROJECTS IN REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA



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Rock Hole Long Pipe PHOTO Poppy van Oorde-Grainger
Voices of the Wheatbelt PHOTO Kylie Mackintosh,
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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Coonana dancers, Rock Hole Long Pipe
PHOTO Poppy van Oorde-Grainger, Voices of the Wheatbelt PHOTO Kristy Colbung,
Creating costumes for Rock Hole Long Pipe PHOTO Barb Howard,
Creating a safe path across the road, Rock Hole Long Pipe PHOTO Mike Gray,
Voices of the Wheatbelt PHOTO Carolyn Stokes,
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House Lantern, Rock Hole Long Pipe PHOTO Mike Gray,
Captain Cool Gudia PHOTO Mike Gray,
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Voices of the Wheatbelt PHOTO Melissa McCarthy

NOTE ON TERMS USED

It is important to acknowledge that there is some diversity of opinion about the best way to describe people with longstanding cultural heritage and affiliations to this country. Some people prefer to use the term 'Aboriginal person'. Others use regionally generic identifiers such as 'Nyungar' (or 'Noongar') or 'Wongutha'. Some are even more specific, using the name of dialect groups such as 'Ballardong Nyungar'. It has also become common for those involved in public policy and government to use 'Indigenous Australians'. There is some contention and all of these terms have their limitations. The way this dilemma is dealt with here is to use a mix of identifiers, interchanging and shifting the way groups are described. This choice was made partly because that is what people do and this is how it was during the projects.

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FOREWORD By Anne Dunn

We work with the arts in communities with the conviction that this work has the capacity to transform people's lives, opening up opportunities for people to express their ideas, frustrations and dreams and helping them map a path towards those aspirations.



Hedge Bandits and teacher Kiera Hill and students
from Kambalda PHOTO Mike Gray

FOREWORD By Anne Dunn

That's an ambitious undertaking that requires significant commitment, time and resources. When all this comes together and the process works, those involved know that it has – they feel it, they hear about it from participants, they share in the joy of change and possibilities. That's been sustaining community artists for decades in this country - through all the ups and downs, the vagaries of funding, policy changes, new government and public rhetoric ... increasingly we need to do more than feel the success of our work. It's important to be able to look at what works, why it works, what the challenges are and what we've learnt from the process. Doing this helps us rise above the subjective response to the work and allows us to share what we've learnt with others who were not a part of the experience. At this point in time it is especially vital because the value of 'community' has recently been elevated in government thinking and we have an opportunity to ensure that it is more than the latest policy buzzword.

The commitment of Community Arts Network WA to effectively evaluate its work and publish its findings is a generous gift to those interested in better ways of working with communities. The integration of the evaluation methods into the design and implementation of the project is especially useful because the learning is constantly informing the work and this dynamic keeps everyone on their toes. Moreover, CAN WA's work in the Eastern Wheatbelt and the Goldfields has been significant and strategic. Apart from the immediate benefits enjoyed by the participants of these projects, the ongoing work of engaging local government in community cultural development, particularly in partnership with local Indigenous people, is crucial to the broader healing and growth of local culture in Australia.

FOREWORD By Anne Dunn

CAN WA and its national counterparts are progressing the appreciation and sophistication of community cultural development work being produced in Australia. The more of that work that is subject to scrutiny by peers from other disciplines, the more we can learn and develop our skill. The increased interest in community initiatives as a potential response to social, cultural and economic challenges mean that many disciplines are looking for examples of community building. The arts in Australia has years of experience to draw on - skilled practitioners, strategic funding and project partners, example after example of transformative practice. We need to engage with our peers to share our knowledge and learn from theirs.

In this case, Dr Dave Palmer's community development background provides grounding for examining the immediate and long-term outcomes of the Rock Hole Long Pipe project. Palmer has made a particular study of the role of the arts in transforming people's lives, because he has seen that it works. His extensive study of this area means that he is well placed to examine CAN WA's work. Dr Chris Sonn has worked with CAN WA over a long period, evaluating its work and studying the impact of community arts and cultural development on his area of concern, community psychology.

The contribution of these two academics in assessing the work and presenting their findings in a form that can be easily digested by others is significant. This, together with CAN WA's openness in scrutinising the projects and publishing the outcomes is something we can all learn from.



Teardrop lanterns
PHOTO Poppy van Oorde-Grainger

ANNE DUNN

Ms Dunn had a 30-year public service career including as CEO of the Departments of Arts, Local Government and Family & Community Services in South Australia and the City of Port Phillip in Victoria. She now runs a consulting practice, working in the areas of chairing, facilitation, mediation, community consultation, leadership and organisational development.

Her previous board appointments include: Deputy Chair, Australia Council; Chair, Community Cultural Development Board; Chair, Australian Government's Regional Women's Advisory Council and she currently chairs the Health Performance Council for the South Australian Government. She was until recently a Director on the Australian Rural Leadership Program for 10 years. She was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia (AO) in 2010 for service to rural women, a range of arts and cultural organisations and to local government through administrative roles.

She is a regular keynote speaker at conferences, appearing as fictional characters appropriate to the event including Mayor Rita Rodeo (from a town somewhere in regional Australia) and Ms Sheila Presley (a woman with a newly found identity). She remains a practicing community artist.

INTRODUCTION By Pilar Kasat

The publication of these evaluation reports is part of the ongoing commitment of CAN WA to share the learning that arises from our work. We do this to assist others working in this field and to encourage others to see community arts and community cultural development as an effective, powerful and creative approach to working with communities.



Captain Cool Gudia PHOTO Poppy van Oorde-Grainger

INTRODUCTION By Pilar Kasat

CAN WA is serious about evaluating its work and along with the regular internal reviews by staff of projects and working processes, we appreciate the skill and insight that is offered to us by academics whose experience allows them to provide a rigorous and more objective view of our work. We have a very active relationship with those undertaking the evaluation and benefit from their input throughout the project as well as through their final reports. In this case our evaluators work from different disciplines – Dr Dave Palmer from Community Development and Dr Christopher Sonn from Community Psychology which adds to the interest in reading them side-by-side.

In publishing these reports we are offering our learning so far in working with these specific communities of the Wheatbelt and the Goldfields, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. CAN WA is not attempting to make definitive statements about community cultural development or offer universal truths for others to follow. We are sharing what happened for us in this instance, what we felt worked, what could have been improved, the issues that arose and the joys we shared. We hope that the enclosed interactive CD gives you a real sense of that, and together with the evaluation reports, it inspires your work and learning.

COMMUNITY ARTS NETWORK WA

Community Arts Network Western Australia is a not-for-profit, peak organisation supporting communities by facilitating community arts and cultural development programs to help build community wellbeing. We inspire and mobilise communities to explore and express their unique culture through our programs, training and funding opportunities.

Established in 1985, CAN WA has a 25-year history in the arts and culture sector of Western Australia. We are driven by the knowledge that culture and the arts play an important part in shaping communities. We understand the need to involve the community in processes that help them track the past, understand and explore the present, and use their imagination to consider how things can be different for the future. Broad community engagement invigorates the arts, generating captivating artworks and delivering significant social and community benefits that build community networks, cohesion and resilience.





Opening the cage, sending smoke and dancing the stories for country:

An evaluation of CAN WA's 'Rock Hole Long Pipe project'

Written by Dave Palmer

LEFT House lantern PHOTO Poppy van Oorde-Grainger

Background to Water Dreaming project

The following report provides a review of CAN WA's work on what was known as the Water Dreaming project. The project encapsulates CAN WA's work in Coolgardie since 2007 and includes the community building, training, performance and community celebration elements of their work. Throughout this work, arts-based practice has been used in an attempt to help make a difference to the lives of people living in the Coolgardie and Kambalda areas.

Captain Cool Gudia sets the lanterns alight
PHOTO Poppy van Oorde-Grainger

The CAN WA team used a community-based approach to draw young people and others into task-focused workshops, arts and cultural activities, music, dance, performance theatre, narrative and story-telling pieces, and a range of other performance and arts-based activities, including the production of a large community event called Rock Hole Long Pipe which was subsequently documented in a publication called, Captain Cool Gudia, the Monster and the Girl.

As well as the intrinsic value of offering art and performance to people who live in regional Australia, the intention of the work was to:

- 1) Bring members of geographically isolated areas together.
- 2) Encourage interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the region.
- 3) Provide opportunities for other personal and social developmental experiences, such as education, training and employment.
- 4) Help prepare local people for participation in community life, including local government.

In other words, the intention of CAN WA was to use arts and cultural practice to help the people of Coolgardie and Kambalda to come together to recreate hope, tell their stories,

participate in art and performance and build people's sense of connection to their community.

Although not solely restricted to work concerned with community building, the evaluation will begin by examining the achievements of CAN WA in relation to the plans as set out in its funding agreement as part of the Stronger Families and Community Strategy of the Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). The report then moves on to discuss some of the lessons learnt from carrying out the work; focusing on the methods used, the challenges confronted and some of the unintended but socially productive consequences that were achieved.

The report concludes that over the past two years, CAN WA has managed to achieve some important things both in relation to the production of good quality art and performance, and in making a difference in the lives of the community. Clearly there is solid evidence of the successful achievement of key objectives as set out in the various project plans. CAN WA can lay claim to considerable success in achieving the 'milestones' established by FaHCSIA.

A particularly impressive element of CAN WA's work has been the way it has used arts, creativity and performance to involve Indigenous young people and members of their families, and to draw non-Indigenous and Indigenous people together.

If there is a singular important feature of the project, it is that CAN WA staff managed to work in a relatively isolated region, something many other organisations find a challenge. As a consequence, many of those involved struggled with a complex array of social and personal problems without the support available in other parts of the country. In this way CAN WA staff had to contend with a range of social issues including poverty, crime prevention, housing, education and training, family violence, self harm and 'risky' behaviour, mental health and substance misuse. In this way, lessons learnt about the approach used can provide insights for others in how to work respectfully in regional Australia.

Overview of CAN WA's work in Coolgardie and Kambalda

The aim of *Water Dreaming*¹ was to bring people from the Shire of Coolgardie together

to explore how drought has affected the community and begin to think about how to improve connections between people during tough times. In part this reflected the fact that the region has recently been declared 'drought affected' by the Australian Government. It also reflected the region's significant problems associated with community isolation and the decline in social infrastructure. To use some of the language that has become popular in social policy discourse, the intention of the project was to use art, creativity and performance as means to buttress local people's social capital.

The project also set out to involve groups who were otherwise socially disparate to participate in a single event to be held in Coolgardie. In part the idea was to create a 'community celebration' that focused upon the history of contributions by Aboriginal people. In this way the project sought to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to hear the stories of senior people, watch as young people performed together and involve people in building a greater degree of respect for Coolgardie's rich history.

Initially, CAN WA and the Shire of Coolgardie jointly undertook the project. As discussed later in the report, during the early stages it became apparent that the Shire was not in the position to take on the role of 'joint project partner'. The project was supported by a number of funding groups but received its principal financial support from FaHCSIA.

CAN WA's work began in August 2007 when the Project Facilitator, Barb Howard, visited the community several times. As part of these visits she conducted what CAN WA describes as 'community visioning' discussions with community members. In particular, an event was organised called the 'Tree of Hope' consultation as part of the Coolgardie Day Festival in mid September. Those participating came together from different parts of the region and included representatives from the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community. This event encouraged people to share their personal and family stories and knowledge about the area.

During the course of the following year, 14 artists from a range of disciplines and art styles worked with people from Coolgardie and Kambalda.

The CAN WA team hosted various events and activities in a bid to involve a broad cross-section of the community and to help shape and create a large arts event. For example, the team worked with a number of local schools (East Kambalda Primary School, Kambalda District High School and Christian Aboriginal Parent-Directed School) to involve young people and other interested members of the community in arts-based workshops, fostering their arts and performance skills and creating work that could be used in a large performance.

In March 2008, the team carried out what they called a 'banner/cultural visioning' project with Year 4 and 5 students in three primary schools and Year 9 and 10 students in two secondary schools. Visual artist Paula Hart led a process in which young people created banners, using this as a means to explore their relationship with the community, the natural environment and the future. Each young person created an individual banner design to contribute to a group-produced banner. The intention was also to use this as a way of making banners from each school and help stimulate further creative work to be used in the



Top: Coolgardie Water Dreaming banner

Below: Performance Storyboard

large public performance, possibly as part of the Coolgardie Day community festival in 2008. It was also important to involve staff from the various schools so that they too could participate in future community events.

In the lead up to this event, held the week following the Coolgardie Day celebrations of 2008, animator Steve Aiton and community artist Poppy van Oorde-Grainger spent four weeks working with students from local schools to create a performance about the history of water in the area. Out of these workshops students produced larger-than-life animations (projected onto the walls of the local museum as part of the performance) and colourful costumes (worn by performers and musicians during the performance). British artist and visiting Healthway Arts in Health fellow, Alison Clough-Jones worked with a group of local students to create large lanterns. These lanterns were used during the performance to signify the large fires that several times swept through the old Coolgardie tent township and pay tribute to those who lost their lives.

The information, ideas and work gathered from these various activities and workshops

were then used to shape a public theatre piece centred on the theme of water. Lockie McDonald, a Perth-based writer, director and producer, was contracted to help write and produce a major public event based on the material that had been created earlier. In addition, community members including the volunteer fire brigade, a biker, a local poet, Indigenous dancers from the Spinifex group and the Hedge Bandits band, worked in conjunction with students, local actor Elizabeth Trott and professional actor Peter Docker to help perform the dramatic and exciting community event called Rock Hole Long Pipe.

This piece was performed in the streets of Coolgardie on the evening of the 20 September 2008. As part of the performance, over 100 participants from the community wound their way through the streets in what was described as an exciting, fun and amazing performance.

During the early part of 2009, CAN WA worked in conjunction with the artists and key community members to produce a book celebrating the performance, outlining the process used and its impact upon the community. This book,

Captain Cool Gudia, the Monster and the Girl, rich in photographs of the performance, was launched in late June 2009 and is a celebration of the work and a resource to others attempting to do similar things.

Maddawonga Galagu ‘country’

The towns of Coolgardie and Kambalda are located over 550 kilometres east of Perth. Both towns sit within the Shire of Coolgardie that also incorporates the towns of Bullabulling, Kurrawang and Widgiemooltha. The Shire covers an area of 30,400 km² and is home to approximately 6,200 people. These towns are located on the westerly edges of the Australian Western Desert.

Mining has long been important in the region. As a consequence, those living within the Shire come from diverse cultural backgrounds including Indigenous Australians, non-Indigenous Australians, Africans, New Zealanders, Croatians, Irish, Filipinos, Samoans and Indians.

The region hosts five schools, including three primary schools and two kindergarten to year 12 schools. Two of the schools have been established to cater for Indigenous students.

Others have a student body that reflects the diversity of cultural backgrounds of people living in the region.

As mentioned previously, the region has recently been declared drought affected by the Australian Government. This is a consequence of the fact that over the past ten years, there has been significantly reduced rainfall with long, hot and dry summers and a lack of replenishing winter rains. This is particularly critical given the reliance of piping in water to the region from outside the area. Indeed, since the turn of the last century, most of the community’s water supply has been piped over 500 kilometres from the Mundaring Weir (located in the hills adjacent to Perth). This source of water is also critical to the needs of Perth, which has had to contend with record low levels over the past few years. As a consequence there is additional pressure on Coolgardie’s water source and the region’s capacity to respond to drought conditions.

Importantly ‘country’ included around Coolgardie has for generations been home to many Indigenous families, many of whom have longstanding connections and intimate knowledge of places and

traditions. As Artistic Director Lockie McDonald said, within the region are many important ceremonial and meeting places for a range of Indigenous groups, ‘from as far away as Tjuntjunjarra, one of Australia’s most isolated communities and further down through into South Australia’ (McDonald 2008).

A number of Indigenous people also provide accounts of many of the changes that have occurred since colonisation of the area. For example, Mudawanga-Gulagoo elder, Mrs Dorothy Dimer, offers her grandfather’s accounts of first meeting Gadia (non-Indigenous people) as they travelled to the region in search of gold. Spinifex people who visited to perform dance and song maintain stories of how during the last ice age their ancestors and totemic ‘relations’ managed to deal with flooding of the Great Australian Bight².

There also exists a more recent history of a region that between 1897 and 1910 attracted enormous mining development so that the Town of Coolgardie swelled to about 40,000 people, providing the wealth generation for much of Western Australia during the 20th Century.

Preliminary remarks about art and community building

Before entering into a discussion of the project’s performance in relation to the objectives, it is worth making some preliminary observations about the business of evaluating the use of arts and culture in conjunction with ‘community-based’ strategies.

According to a number of writers (see Saggars and Gray 1991; Taylor et al 2008; McMurray 1999, Kenny 2006), there has been a range of ways of responding to the health and wellbeing of communities. From the 1930s to the 1970s, responses to the wellbeing of non-Indigenous communities were characterised by reliance upon a welfarist model. This approach saw the emphasis placed upon the state providing a basic safety net or social services for individuals and families who could not take care of basic needs such as housing, education, income and health. Here resources went to experts who decided what was best for those who were failing to look after themselves. Arts practice was generally seen as having little role in community building. However, art therapy began being used as a means of contending with social pathology and community dysfunction.

² For more information about Spinifex People - Cane, Scott. Pila Nguru: an ethnography of the Spinifex People in the context of native title. 2000.

During this same period, the treatment of Indigenous communities was characterised by either neglect or reliance upon what many describe as a combination of the biomedical approach to health and an assimilationist approach to welfare (see Haebich 1988 and 2000). These approaches saw the emphasis placed upon professionals and bureaucrats understanding and strictly governing Indigenous communities. At the same time, the state placed great store in attempts to have Indigenous young people 'assimilate' and take on the culture, values and practices of other Australians. During this period, governments engaged in the systematic removal of Indigenous children from their family and communities, attempting the eventual 'absorption' of Indigenous people into the 'white' community. Often the consequences for family and community were devastating, resulting in long-term social dislocation, pain and appalling neglect by the state. However, it was also during this period when artists, arts educators and some missionaries began to stimulate an active Aboriginal arts movement.

Examples of Aboriginal art 'schools' that grew from this mission-led influence, later to enjoy international acclaim include the Carrolup, Ernabella, Mowanjum, those in the Western Desert region such as Balgo, and others from the Tiwi Islands.

The early seventies saw a shift in approach away from the welfare state providing for the good of its citizens, towards an emphasis upon increased community involvement in decision-making processes. In part this was shaped by the global trend towards community-led change, human rights and local people's participation in health and social service delivery. It was also shaped by a crisis in the ability of the welfare state to provide for all but the most troubled and a need to mobilise 'community' as a cheaper way to govern (see Mowbray 2004).

It was during this period that community arts grew in popularity. This movement (initially called 'community arts' but more recently 'community cultural development') was partly prompted by the assessment that the cultural expressions of Aboriginals, migrants, women, the poor and workers were rarely appreciated and poorly resourced

(Kirby 1991). The movement gained great momentum after the election of the Whitlam Government and their subsequent establishment of the Aboriginal Arts Board and Community Arts and Development Committee of the Australia Council for the Arts. As a consequence, community arts initiatives increased emphasising 'artswriters' as opposed to 'artists' working with non-elites to help increase broader participation in arts and cultural production, encourage community expressions of culture and promote cultural democracy (Kirby 1991, p. 19). Access and participation were two of the most formative of ideas and characteristics of community arts. The Whitlam Government argued that, 'access to art and culture were democratic rights and active and equal participation in them was an indicator of a just society' (Hawkins 1993, p. 31). Although more often used than clearly defined, community arts practice came to stand for work that was at least as interested in the process of arts production as the product itself. Not surprisingly, important to this process was the forming of relationships between artswriters and communities, particularly marginalised communities, who had previously been neglected by artists. Also

important was the involvement of community in choosing the artistic medium, the subject matter and the rationale for cultural production (Marginson 1993, p. 255).

At a similar time there was a shift in the approach to dealing with the lives of Indigenous Australians with the emergence of the Indigenous community-controlled organisation movement and popularity in ideas about 'community-based' change and community development. As well as being influenced by the global movement towards engaging 'community' as a more effective underpinning to government, it was also shaped by calls for 'self-determination' by Indigenous groups. During this time, many Aboriginal community-controlled art centres grew across the country. This prompted a surge in the growth of the Aboriginal art (and subsequently general Australian export) industry. As well as supporting the local community economy, this also served to support the maintenance of culture and law, support community claims for land rights and later native title and provide access to and a point of focus around traditional country (McCulloch and McCulloch-Childs 2008, Taylor 2005).

During the 1990s, and arguably into the present, there has been a shift towards what Taylor et al (2008, p. 94) describe as an instrumentalist approach. Here decisions about community wellbeing are shaped by the need to provide the best services within a 'market model'. There has been movement away from the idea that community-based initiatives are in and of themselves necessarily the best avenues for quality service delivery. Instead, decisions about what is best for the health of communities has shifted to new kinds of professionals, those who contract out and manage targets, outcomes, deliverables and consumers in a way that is competitive, accountable and publicly responsible. Art in this context is seen as a means for communities, particularly those who are economically marginalised, to participate more fully in a global economy. Particularly as globalisation opens up new markets and provides new forms of access to remote communities, art, cultural production and new creative economies are seen as a way for community to bridge the geographic and social gaps previously in place.

It is also worth making three observations about the connection between volunteering and community involvement, particularly given the emphasis of the Water Dreaming project. First of all, although it is often assumed that volunteering leads to a healthier community, precisely what it means to be a 'volunteer' and what it means to 'do community' is often ambiguous. Secondly, there is not always a straightforward connection between volunteering and community building. Indeed, people undertake volunteering for a range of reasons including self-interest, self-satisfaction and self-promotion. Thirdly, recording the level of participation in volunteering is difficult given that most volunteering occurs in informal settings, often in ways that are impromptu and frequently without the instigation of governmental institutions.

Another challenge confronting this evaluation is that it is not easy to definitively demonstrate a cause and effect relationship between arts practice and certain kinds of impacts upon individuals and the community. In part this reflects the fact that many of the strategies used are designed to shape the long-term quality

of life of communities, not so much directly on individual (e.g. educational, criminal, economic) behaviour. In part it reflects the aspirations of organisations such as CAN WA to provide opportunities that are themselves procedural, that is, building connections and relationships that may at some point in the future shape individual and community change.

Notwithstanding the challenges confronting this evaluation, it is important to make some observations about the project: the methods used, the outcomes achieved and its impact on the community. In particular it is important to look at the methods CAN WA has used. It is also important to compare these methods to similar work carried out elsewhere. From here one can draw inferences about the quality of the community building work. In other words, in the absence of direct cause and effect data, one can extrapolate that certain practice is more likely to encourage community building. It follows that by comparing CAN WA's work with the available research on sound or 'good practice' it is possible to draw reasonable conclusions. If CAN WA is using practice that has

been established to be successful elsewhere then it follows that they will see at least some measure of success.

To assist in this regard, it is instructive to turn to what the international literature says in relation to 'good practice' in similar kinds of work. The following table provides an overview of what stands in the international literature as 'markers of success' in projects designed to help build healthy communities.



Table 1: Markers of success in community building

MARKER OF SUCCESS	SOURCE
Feature one: Connecting the health of people with the health of 'country' and place.	WALSH ET AL 2002 NESBIT ET AL 2001 CUMMINS ET AL 2008
Feature two: Adopting a reciprocal approach to community participation and development i.e. 'give and take' involvement of local people in governance, decision-making, workshops, other activities and accountability.	FOSTER 2007 WOODS ET AL 2002 CUMMINS 2008
Feature three: Adopting an approach where local (Indigenous) conceptual ideas lead program organisation.	COLLARD & PALMER 2006 TRUDGEN 2000
Feature four: Adopting a healthy and vibrant living approach, maximising local people's access to opportunities for employment, housing, health care, training, sport, recreation, social activity and arts.	TAYLOR ET AL 2008 MILLER 2001
Feature five: Extending the social and skills repertoire of struggling members of the community and encouraging them to seek excellence and high quality work.	MILLS, D. & BROWN, P 2004 SAGGERS ET AL 2004 TAYLOR ET AL 2008
Feature six: Drawing upon active methods, arts, creativity and local cultural forms.	MACCALLUM ET AL 2006 O'MALLEY AND SUTTON 1997
Feature seven: Moving beyond short-term and one-off programs, opting for a systematic approach involving projects that have an extended amount of time in community.	SUTTON 1997 PALMER 2009
Feature eight: Creating a constellation of programs and setting out a range of activities to cater to a wide variety of interests, needs and situations of local participants.	WHITE 1998 TAYLOR ET AL 2008 PALMER 2006
Feature nine: Adopting multi-organisational involvement, including the involvement of Indigenous people, so that a wide range of skills, knowledge and resources can be drawn upon in creating long-term solutions.	FOSTER 2007 PALMER 2006 WHITE 1998 SUTTON 1997
Feature ten: Creating opportunities for contact and work between families and different generations in the community.	CUMMINS AT AL 2008 MACCALLUM ET AL 2006 KAPLAN ET AL 2002
Feature eleven: Employing competent staff, in particular those who possess a combination of skills and experience in working with Indigenous communities.	TAYLOR ET AL 2008 CUMMINS ET AL 2008
Feature twelve: Building in evaluation and review, using indirect indicators and documenting unintended but socially productive consequences.	TAYLOR ET AL 2008 PALMER 2009 MCMURRAY 1999

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE PROJECT'S SUCCESS

A full evaluation of project achievements against project plans is available on request from CANWA. However, total reliance on such an evaluation runs the risk of being of limited value. It is also important to recognise that practice is often contingent and emerges from a range of circumstances, not simply what organisations, funding bodies and program architects imagine at the beginning of projects. What follows is a discussion of what stood out as distinctive about the work in Coolgardie and Kambalda, as well as the elements that bore resemblance to similar work elsewhere.

The achievements and reasons for success

People who were present and/or involved in the community performance took the view that 'Rock Hole Long Pipe' was one of the most successful community events staged in recent Coolgardie history. What follows is a discussion of what worked and what was behind this event, and the work preceding it.

There are a range of reasons why this was an important project.

The centrality of art, performance and digital tools

The first and perhaps most important observation to make about the project is that it relied upon the use of arts and performance practice. The work, described elsewhere as 'community cultural development', involves the use of creativity, arts and performance to help artists, performers, community organisers, funding bodies and participants join together and make changes at the individual and community level (Sonn, Drew & Kasat, 2002 p. 12). The intention is to help draw out people's taken for granted or tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967), and help them take action for a better future using creativity and imagination (Kins & Peddie, 1996). The objective is to not only produce art but to encourage people to work together to make changes in their lives and communities (Adams & Goldbard, 2002 p. 33).

These changes can be many and varied. Sometimes the work can help free people from the 'traps of habit, help [them] see things from a different perspective,

suggest connections between varied subjects and transform communities and the way in which government agencies operate' (Mills 2007, p. 36). Boal (2007 p. 13) adds that using performance and arts work can also help to enliven imagination and provide opportunities for people to 'rehearse' what might be possible. In other words, this approach can help people take on the character of the person they could become.

Particularly critical in this work is the use CAN WA staff made of a variety of artistic forms and styles. Participants, particularly young people, got to experiment with digital animation software, create lanterns, masks, instruments and costumes, learn how to use makeup, perform and create music, and learn about the production process and design. As one teacher said when talking about the animation work of her students, 'these kids are learning to use software that I have never seen, let alone used.' Impressively many got to work directly with professional and recognised actors and very talents artists (evaluation records).

According to a number who were involved, members of the community were able to

participate in a performance that was of high quality. As a number of local people remarked, this gave those involved a sense of shared pride in a community that rarely is accorded quality. When asked to talk about what the project brought to the community one person said, 'the fact that it was a worthwhile production with fireworks and lighting and sound ... the fact that it wasn't dodgy - it has the potential to give kids the message that if they want to pursue things like this themselves then it can be done, it is possible.' Another concluded that 'It created pride rather than embarrassment' (evaluation records 2008).

This use of arts and performance is important in a number of ways. Arts, performance and new creative technologies are increasingly shaping the lives of communities. Indeed over the past five to ten years, there has been a rapid take-up of creative and digital technology by young people. Young people are now picking up and using multimedia appliances such as digital and video cameras, MP3 players and other multi-functional devices. They are also operating 'user-friendly' applications for post-production such as iMovie, iTunes, iPhoto and GarageBand.

This is partly because the technology has become fast, accessible, highly portable and more publicly available. Most young people are now routinely logging into a vast and complex digital culture largely unfamiliar to their parent's generations. This world is 'symbolic-rich, language-saturated and technology-enhanced' (Hull 2003, p. 232). The associated skills, knowledge and cognitive repertoires that young people are gaining from this are changing the way that they 'participate' in the social world. Young people are leading the way in reconfiguring how others see them, forging new identities and transforming global ideas from an ever-increasing pool of sources. These social and technological changes provide enormous economic potential for young people who are leading the way as experts in the various creative industries. Discussing this movement Cunningham (2007, p. 19-20) cites the Carnegie Foundation, who suggest, 'the new forms of newsgathering and distribution, grassroots or citizen journalism and blogging sites are changing the very nature of who produces news ... the 18-34 demographic is creating the inexorable momentum.'

As well as its success as a community event, the project offered much in the way of artistic and performance opportunities to a community with limited access to professional artists, arts education and creative mediums. As a consequence young people were exposed to a breadth of artistic forms, particularly in relation to areas such as performance, dance, animation and costume design. Not only was this important for providing new opportunities for students, it also had considerable merit in relation to the development of teachers. As one educator observed, 'to be perfectly frank, schools in places like this have a large number of graduate teachers who, as you would expect, a limited arts education repertoire. Mostly arts curriculum consists of a bit painting and elements of other fine art forms. What Rock Hole did was bring into the school, and hence the professional development of graduate teachers, a whole range of artistic forms that you just don't get out here.' Clearly, one of the primary benefits of the Rock Hole Long Pipe project was that it offered the regionally isolated communities of 'Coolgardie and Kambalda, one of the few opportunities to

work with professional artists and develop the range of skills necessary to produce a large-scale performance event.'

Making this point, one local parent said, 'the observing of performance is its own education. Having exposure to arts is really important for the general public's culture.'

Another teacher observed of the work, 'It expands their horizons for what art might be.'

The importance of working with the community

An allied feature of the work of those involved with the project is the way it uses the arts to work along with members of the community. This emphasis on what some describe as community development or capacity building has a number of dimensions. As mentioned earlier, it involves arts workers being led by what is important to participants, particularly taking up and following the themes, views and conceptual ideas of young people, seniors and others who make up the project's 'community'. This follows similar work that has its roots in the British community movement. T.R. Batten (1957, p. 1), one of the earliest advocates for community

development, describes it as 'a movement to promote better living for the whole community, with the active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community.' In this way, community development has long been seen to be 'non-directive' with people aspiring to work in such a way that locals consent and actively participate in change to improve their lot (see Kenny 2006).

This technique of using arts to bring individuals together to work on social and community change works in a number of ways to build healthier communities. It can help create friendships, social networks and links between individuals and their broader social environment. These include the ability to act autonomously, function in socially heterogeneous groups, use tools interactively and create art for public exhibition.

Unique to this kind of community development work is the use of arts to help create social spaces so people have a chance to meet, participate and/or watch a performance about their place, share food, encounter each other as human beings, listen to each other's stories and build levels of intimacy not otherwise available. The performance of Rock Hole

Long Pipe was quintessentially about building community.

Another hurdle confronting people in the region is the range of practical difficulties associated with bringing together people from such distances and geographic isolation. As one teacher from Kambalda remarked, 'it is not easy getting people from Kambalda to get over to Coolgardie ... its about an hours drive there and then an hour back ... apart from sporting events there is little that will do this anymore.'

One person said, 'it was wonderful to see our kids all performing together ... its hard to get people from Kambalda and Coolgardie to come together ... because of the distance ... Rock Hole was able to make this happen.' According to many who were interviewed, the Rock Hole project offers an excellent example of how to support people living in regional WA contend with their sense of social isolation. Partly speaking literally and partly metaphorically one person put it simply, 'Rock Hole brought people together, to work together, eat together, perform together and build things together.'

Clearly a key outcome of the project has been its success in providing the impetus for groups of people to come together and work on something of mutual interest. In this way, the approach used by CAN WA (drawing upon community-based participation) has provided an important venue for local people to extend their working relationships.

The project team was in part made up of locals working with a small group of outsiders.

This team worked on a daily basis with local groups such as the Coolgardie Christian Aboriginal Parent-Directed School students and community, Kambalda District High School students and community, Indigenous elders and families, businesses and mining companies, local regional artists, the Coolgardie Day Festival Steering Committee, the Shire of Coolgardie staff and Councillors, Wongutha Birni Aboriginal Corporation, the Rural Clinical School of Western Australia, the Kalgoorlie Discover the Round Committee, local media outlets, Coolgardie Volunteer Fire and Emergency Services, Kambalda Mine Rescue Teams, Ground Up Action Group and BHP Nickel West.

Important also has been local groups taking on elements of CAN WA's approach. In particular, having witnessed the success in attracting so much family involvement in the project, one senior member of a local school has undertaken to follow a similar approach. Asked to identify project strengths he said, 'We have been trying to get families more involved in the school. This occasion just brought families out there. This meant that we as a school got some ideas about how we can attract families, it has set a benchmark for us. It has opened our eyes to the concept of getting communities and families more involved'.

Evidence from elsewhere demonstrates that success in bringing groups together in this way helps create the kind of organisational connections that are valuable ingredients for building social bridges and carrying out other socially beneficial projects (see Wright and Palmer 2007 and Palmer 2009). It is very early to make detailed assessments in relation to Rock Hole's impact on what many describe as 'social capital'. However, there is already evidence that people are using the social and organisational

'networks' created and buttressed by the project to take on local social issues such as family violence, abuse and poor participation rates in education.

Also impressive has been some indications that community participation in the Rock Hole projects has influenced their lives in other positive ways. There is some evidence that there exists a correlation between project participation and some improved involvement of young people in school, young people extending their interest in a broader range of jobs, increased involvement in other arts and community projects, extra and after school involvement in community organisational work and general civic responsibility. For example, when talking about a particular young woman involved in the performance one local teacher said, 'its definitively the case that she has been motivated by her involvement to look at a future in performance work. I'm not sure that she would be looking at extending her schooling in Perth were it not for the project.' Another teacher recounted of one other student, 'because she worked alongside a professional costume designer she's really taking seriously the possibility of

a career in fabric design ... you could see how the mentoring relationship on the project has nurtured this.'

There is certainly evidence that the project assisted the capacity of local schools. Having artists work with students at almost no cost to the schools was very much appreciated by teaching staff. This allowed schools to better meet their obligations in providing quality curriculum experiences in the areas of arts education, science, the environment and social studies. It also provided valuable knowledge, extended the contacts and increased the repertoire of early career teachers.

Intercultural exchange and relationships across the community

As outlined earlier, the Water Dreaming Project encompassed a series of workshops and community activities that culminated in a public performance over an 18-month period. The extent to which different members of the community were involved varied considerably. Some simply were in the audience during the public performance or lent a hand in the week leading up to the event. Others, including many

young people, participated through their involvement in workshops, organisation, planning and creating props, costumes and the creation of streets of Coolgardie as a stage for the performance. Some moved in and out of involvement. Others enjoyed an intense involvement in one element of the project. However, the consistent message from participants was that a leading element in the success of the work is the value they received from building relationships with each other. For example, a number of students spoke about the chance given by the project to meet and work with other students from the neighbouring town. This is not something many of these young people would otherwise have been able to do. As one teacher said,

Being out in a country high school they don't often have the opportunity to work with other schools because of our distance away from others. It was good to be able to work individually but have the chance to work with others outside of their immediate group.

For these guys it was also important to learn about the history of some of our sister suburbs or areas. Like these guys still have a hard time believing that Coolgardie was at one time bigger than Kalgoorlie is today.

Through the animation they learnt about little snippets of that history. (evaluation records 2008).

What this produced was noteworthy. As a number of those involved in the planning of the project said, one of the major successes involved bringing different kinds of people together. As one person said 'there was an opportunity to bring two disparate groups together at a number of levels. There is the physical and social distance between Coolgardie and Kambalda. And then there is the distance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people across the communities. What we managed to do was bring them together.' (evaluation records 2008).

According to a number of people interviewed, the history of 'race relations' in the region made contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people fraught. It is evident from the number and mix of people attending and participating in both the workshops and performance that one strength of the project was its success in bringing together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. As one person said, 'there has never been an event like this that brought together black and white to join together in

celebration'. Another noted, that 'the event brought Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together ... while it needs to keep happening and it would take something more consistent to achieve long term change, it did do something that is very rarely achieved' (evaluation records 2008).

There is also evidence that those involved in leading the project had considerable experience and knowledge in relation to working in association with Indigenous communities and Indigenous artists. Indeed, local Indigenous people provided much of this expertise. For example, making arrangements for the Coonana dancers to perform demanded considerable cultural knowledge and sensitivity. The combined skills of people like Mrs Dorothy Dimer, Trevor Jamieson, Geoffrey and Christine Stokes, Allison Dimer, Steve Sinclair, Lockie McDonald and Peter Docker made this possible. The leadership of Mrs Dorothy Dimer was also important. She provided regular feedback on the writing of the story for the performance, where and what point various activities occurred, the route the performance would take and the timing of fire and smoke

signalling, where to collect wood and how to carefully invite people to become involved (evaluation records 2008).

The process of checking and re-checking, consulting and feeding back to Indigenous people was another feature of the project. In this way local protocols, cultural sensitivities and important Indigenous practices were regularly reviewed and taken into account. This is important in any work that aspires to work with community and encourage 'community cultural development'. It also helped ensure that breaches to local protocols were minimised. It was also critical as it modelled traditional Indigenous systems of respect and community governance (see Woods et al 2000). As one person said,

Even if you think you know the answer ... and often you actually didn't ... the process of asking makes people feel like you are paying them respect ... because you are. (evaluation records 2008).

Others thought the project and event impressive because local Indigenous cultural forms have had few venues for public expression over the past few years. In particular, public

performance of song and dance (central in Indigenous cultural life, government and business) has been missing for some time. Indigenous people were moved to see traditional dance happening again and children involved in a public performance. In fact, reports to this effect have reached the evaluator from a range of different sources. One Indigenous person said, 'I believe it has been over 40 years since that old dancing has happened in Coolgardie. It made my heart so happy to see those old dances coming back'.

The achievements in this regard need to be seen as considerably significant. Any aspirations to 'build community' in an area where Indigenous Australians make up part of the community ought to recognise that song and dance are central in the maintenance of law, culture and social life. Indeed in Indigenous cultural life those who hold the songs and dances are the men and women of high degree. To put it another way, the people who sing are the leaders, the people of influence, those who shape the government of the community. As Ellis (1993, p. 1), one of the most well respected of western scholars of Aboriginal music observes, 'the most knowledgeable person in a tribal

community was the person 'knowing the songs'.

In Indigenous tradition, song and dance often acts in a multitude of ways to maintain 'community.' It operates as one of the most important vehicles of communication, education, transmission of knowledge and, importantly, government. Through song and dance people learn about the history, the laws, the system of relationships, how individuals are developed and nurtured, how country is managed and cared for, news of others and where and when to go to particular places. The public performance of what Ellis (1993, p. 56) calls 'open songs' features to ensure that the whole community learns and develops together.

Additionally, dance and music play an enormously important role in encouraging 'cross-cultural' exchange. Again Ellis (1993, p. 2-4) is instructive on this topic. She observed that through experiencing and producing music (and dance given its mutual association in Indigenous practice),

People can attain a perspective which allows validly opposite opinions to coexist without damage to either ... [the student

of Indigenous music] inevitably gains a great deal of experience in reconciling and rising above contradictions both within himself (sic) and in his (sic) relations with others. This occurs as a group process when people centre their attention on the common goal of making music together (Ellis 1993, p. 2)

In this way, through song and dance it becomes possible to experience what Pitjantjatjara people call, nganana tjunguringanyi (we are all becoming one).

One might say that the act of 'singing for country' is also the act of strengthening the connection between community and country. This means that the act of singing is instrumental in 'building stronger community'. This is so because in Indigenous law, culture and community 'music is an essential part of life, a force without which [the] known world crumbles.' (Ellis 1993, p. 129). In Indigenous culture and law, learning music is often a way of entering the highest levels of intellectual, spiritual, political and community life.

The act of singing involves not only entertainment, but also bringing into being certain events in the life of the community.

It is also the act of bringing back health to a community. Furthermore singing 'calls one' to extended fellowship with community and country. By singing country (community) one gets drawn into an interdependent relationship with country (community). As one Pitjantjatjara man put it, 'you don't sing the inma (song, dance and performance) – it sings you. Kulila! Kulila! (Listen to it! Feel the music!)' (Marshall 2001, p. 33).

Therefore it is of immense importance to note that when Mrs Dorothy Dimer invited the people of Coonana to dance in Coolgardie, she encouraged a profoundly influential act in relation to 'building community'.

This is signified in the performance when the characters of Leena and Captain Cool Gudia in one voice drew the night to a conclusion by saying, 'coming together as one people: one sun, one moon, one fire, one community – one town.' This was followed by the performance of the Spinifex visitors, who for the first time in a generation, shared their dance with the people of Coolgardie. As the script of the performance and the book records,

That night, under a new moon, they opened the cage together and set the tjilkarmata, the mingawi, the echidna free.

Once again the Maddawonga Galagu people made smoke signals calling people in from across the desert, the coastal mountain ranges and the sea to make ceremony, dance and tell stories.

On that night they dance dances and told stories of old man emu, of miners close escapes, of water pipes from the city, of rock-holes and water trees and stories of country (Docker in CAN WA 2009, p. 38).

Intergenerational exchange

Another important feature of the project was its focus upon working across the generations and bringing children, young people and other age groups together. This kind of work is what in the US and Britain people have described as 'intergenerational exchange'. The asserted benefits of intergenerational exchange are many and varied and include the idea that they help instil important civic values (Woffard 1999, 92), strengthen mutual understanding (Berns 1997), rebuild social networks and create inclusive communities (Granville and Hatton-Yeo 2002, 197), increase tolerance, a level of comfort and

intimacy between the old and young, and dispel clichés and myths about the aging process (Manheimer, cited in Intergenerational Strategies 2004).

The intergenerational elements of CAN WA's work emerged in the earliest stages of the project when local elders such as Mrs Dorothy Dimer expressed their keenness to pass on their knowledge to young people. Deeply moving was the care expressed on the part of older community members towards the future of local young people. For example, Mr Victor Dale said, 'I love the concept of working with the children as their minds are young and they still listen.' (CAN WA 2009, p. 3).

Following on from this, the project continued the theme of working across the generations. This has been put into practice in a number of ways. Senior people took on important roles in storytelling, offering accounts of what it was like to grow up in Coolgardie in earlier times. They also provided advice to CAN WA about elements of local cultural protocols that needed to be maintained. They were assisted by others, not quite so old, who worked closely with artists and

young people, also offering histories, advice and carrying out preparation work more directly with younger participants. For example, a number of local teachers provided 'out of the classroom' support acting as arts and production mentors to young people. Another local musician took a role of musical director, working closely with young people in the lead up to and during the performance. The public performance itself provided one of the most significant intergenerational events Coolgardie has seen in many years with parents, young people, seniors and others from the two communities literally working side-by-side in the lead-up, during and after the performance (evaluation records 2008).

Furthermore, those working on the public performance designed things to encourage the various generations to share the same (communal) space. The performance of Rock Hole Long Pipe occurred through the streets of Coolgardie, involving the community moving together through the backlanes, parks and important sites of the main town area. In this way the performance encouraged people to not only share, but also think about the

way public space can be shared in the future. During the later stages of the performance, young people, seniors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people shared connections over a meal and cups of tea. In this way unforced natural connections were made.

The performance itself was intergenerational in its content and substance, examining and revealing public consideration topics relevant to the development of intimate and long-standing relationships between the young and elderly, the 'sustainability' of the region for future generations, and the complex and intertwined connection between looking after country and looking after others in the community. One might suggest that the storyline of Rock Hole Long Pipe is itself a narrative about the need for a richer and more courageous exchange of ideas between young people, those who have come before them and those who come from outside. Indeed the story acts as a metonym for local young people's fight against outside forces that seek to take away their future inheritance. It concerns a dream 'about the three kids who took on that flash bloke who came to town with

a mouth full of answers and a monster in a cage. That fella called himself Captain Cool Gudia, but those three kids they gave it to him proper, anah!' (Docker in CAN WA 2009, p. 9). The story also models the act of young people drawing upon the wisdom of their elders. Its lead character, Leena, offers her grandmother's ideas and astute perceptions with such pearls as 'in the old days when people worked together as one family, they succeeded more often and survived times of great drought', and 'we have two ears, two eyes, two nostrils, two hands and only one mouth, you learn when your one tongue doesn't work.' (Docker in CAN WA 2009, p. 25 and 30).

Staffing, flexibility and presence in the region

Another important element in CAN WA's work was the quality, attention, demeanour and skills of key project workers. In addition, a critical factor was that workers spent considerable time in Coolgardie and Kambalda during the workshop process and in the lead up to the community performance. In this way workers provided a much-needed extra set of ideas, hands and ears in a community setting where resources are diminishing.

The fact that many of the team spent considerable time in Coolgardie prior to the performance is something that others noticed and appreciated. For example, when asked to identify some of the ingredients for the success of the project one local woman said,

Barb and then Lockie spent so much time actually living in Coolgardie. This was helped by the fact that Barb had previously lived in the area. Lockie had good strong links and had a past here too. I also believe Poppy had worked on something in Kambalda before. Oh, and Peter Docker was known around here too (evaluation records 2008).

Another said,

One of the reasons why the performance worked was that Barb and Lockie set themselves and the artists up in a house for quite a long time leading up to the event (evaluation records 2008).

Not only was this important for the scheduling of workshops and the organisation of the event, it also made it possible for project workers to get to know local organisations, local councils and services providers. As a consequence, they were seen by people as 'approachable', 'with their feet on the ground', 'helpful'

and 'committed' (evaluation records 2008).

At the same time the project was able to call upon the considerable talents of local artists and performers. For example, local actor and musician Alice Haines was involved throughout the project, assisting in work with the schools, carrying out some of the workshops, being a central local link to people, organising to get people to events, acting as musical director and playing during the community performance. Likewise, although he was away on a tour with the nationally acclaimed production Ngapartji Ngapartji, Trevor Jamieson was central to the preparations, assisting as protocol consultant and making arrangements for the Spinifex dancers to perform. These two people were critical to the project. As local Coolgardie people they possessed important knowledge of the community, the country and the Indigenous community. In addition, both are nationally acclaimed and award winning artists, excelling as musicians, stage performers and actors. Securing their involvement was not only helpful for the support they offered. It served as a reminder to the community and

the rest of the project team that the region already possesses remarkably well-recognised talent. Importantly, having two very successful artists in their own community also provides young people with extraordinary role models.

The team's patience and tenacity was also noticed. Another person observed that,

Barb led us into organising the event. I think that her perseverance was an important ingredient in the project's success, particularly in the early stages when we had problems with others in the community. Barb believed in us and believed we could make the event work (evaluation records 2008).

Another picked up on the dexterity of workers,

One of the consistent qualities of the artists was that they were wonderful working with students. Now that I think about it, they were wonderful at all sorts of things. They were patient, kind, generous with their time and their skills and above everything else they really chipped in for this community (evaluation records 2008).

The project also provided the opportunity to recruit people from outside the community, making available a set of skills and talents

that would otherwise not have been available. These skills were both varied and recognised by people from the community. For example, people said,

The artists were great in the way they worked with students, giving positive feedback, not telling the kids off so that they got treated with a degree of positive regard. This is something that many of these kids don't get very often.

They were good at remembering people's names.

They showed respect for local people in the way they reflected back how important their stories were.

People like Barb and Lockie kept coming back to see us, get our ideas, check that things were going along well and ask our advice about who and how to involve people (evaluation records 2008).

People saw the team as creative but flexible and responsive, sensitive but astute to the possibilities and opportunities that members of the community might bring to the performance. As one young person testified, as a consequence of the team's skills and openness they were able to offer practical support.

Being able to work with Barb, and Steve and the Hedge Bandits and

just talking to them after the class has given me ideas about other people who have done the work. They have given me particular contacts if I want to develop stuff and other drama and music contacts I guess, not just in our community (evaluation records 2008).

This was certainly confirmed by members of the community when they were asked to talk about the things that made the work successful,

The fact that you have skilled artists coming to Kambalda and generously giving of their time and skills ... this meant a tremendous amount in a place as isolated as this ... it meant that the students and for that matter staff got to do things, like use animation software and participate in performance art, that they would never get to do (evaluation records 2008).

In this way the approach taken by the CAN WA team demonstrated a high capacity for improvised community arts work. This is reminiscent and perhaps shaped by 'improvisation' training in arts and stage performance. According to Farmer (2005, p. 1), in improvisation actors are taught to free themselves of the need to have complete control over the performance. Far from being something that needs to

be fixed, managed, immediately resolved or perhaps covered up, the experience of 'not knowing' is precisely what is necessary for improvisational performance.

In improvisation, actors are also taught that their response in a performance depends entirely on context. To be sure, the very act of improvisation is not possible to completely script or generate in a formalistic way. Actors need to be skilled in relating 'with regard' to the previous speaker and those around them. Each speaker or actor has to see the utterances and actions of those who come before as 'a good offer' to be built upon (Wright and Palmer 2007, p. 51).

Therefore, the task of working with community demands of workers similar skills and philosophical approaches. As in 'improv' stage work, the project's work demands that team members manage without a carefully or definitively scripted plan. It also demanded that artists let go, at least to an extent, of their preconceived ideas and technically trained skills. In contrast team members were highly dependent upon what the community, the landscape, the facilities and the 'country' made available. This project made it necessary for artists to mix up the 'dance' of taking up centre-stage at one

moment and then retreating back-stage at other moments so that community members could participate more fully.

In this practice there is a demand for what many artists consider an anathema: self-restraint and moderation. However, as Sennett (2003 p. 212) observes, collaboration demands restraint. In his essay on Respect, Sennett uses the performance of the Brahms Clarinet Quintet in B Minor, Op. 115 to help illustrate the importance of exercising restraint when building community and social bonds. He suggests that the Quintet, rich, complex and demanding as it is, will sound like a 'mushy soup' if played by both a group of amateurs and a group made up of skilled egotists who insist on demonstrating their full talents. On the other hand, it can be played with beauty when the musicians demonstrate artfulness in both being prepared to hold themselves back at some points, play together at other points and dominating the performance when the time demands. His analogy is worth citing for its relevance to the practice of community cultural development.

In theory, holding oneself back keeps one at a distance from

others. In performing the quintet, avoiding the danger of swelling out instead achieves distinction and articulation within a whole. By holding back we make our presence felt – which is reserve's most subtle and more positive side.

As in all expressive labor, there is an objective problem to be solved: the soup of notes. The performers together will have to solve that problem by learning to play as one, in unison, but also by learning how to hold back or how to dominate. The gestures in sound they create become rituals, which orient them to one another and speak together.

Rituals in social life are equally complicated acts of knitting people together – with the great difference that the 'social text' is not a written musical score; it emerges through trial and error, and then becomes engraved in memory as tradition. The hold of tradition comes from this knowing already how to express oneself to others; whereas for chamber musicians, performing traditions can help, but the real social glue occurs when the performers have to work things out for themselves (Sennett 2003, p. 212-213).

There is some evidence that this is what the team was able to achieve in its work with the people of Coolgardie and Kambalda. There were moments when the artists

took centre stage, moments when they worked in unison and moments when they stepped into the background.

In large measure this was made possible because of Barb Howard's success in recruiting talented and competent staff. This is doubly impressive when one considers that, due to the isolation of the work, staff needed to work away from home, live in close quarters for long periods of time and make do with the available resources and props.

This emphasis on the involvement in a community and the fact that the performance elements of the work had their roots in workshop and project work that stretched back 12 months, also helped lead to quality. Some participants in earlier workshops did not participate in the final performance. However, it appears that the majority of students and young people who helped create the production and build various props and arts pieces also participated in the final public performance.

Another feature of the style of the team reflects the importance Barb and Lockie placed in ensuring that production workers and performers were taken care of.

You can see it in the way Lockie approaches the task of looking after his team. He has a few rules such as 'the troops always get a feed first', so that you never see him eating until the rest of the workers have got their food. Another one of his principals is that he sleeps on the couch so that everyone else gets a decent, well as decent as possible, bed (evaluation records 2008).

Story telling and performance

Another important reason for the success at Coolgardie was due to the part that storytelling or narrative played in the project. Storytelling was important in a number of ways. Combining story telling with tactile and active work (e.g. incorporating it into school arts workshops, the performance and the book) both helped people recall and pass on elements in their lives and help shape the project itself. In this way, story telling mixed with performance and production work acted as a form of mnemonics, improving and bringing to a public forum people's memory of life in the region and shaping the very subject matter in the performance work (Horsley, 2007 p. 1).

Storytelling also acted to help people build the confidence necessary to talk with each other

and work together, despite the fact that the region suffers from a history of fear and mistrust between different groups. There is much rhetorical stock placed in the idea of 'building community engagement' in public policy and community development language. Involving people in storytelling was an important, practical way of putting substance to this idea of 'engagement', helping the CAN WA team to breach or challenge people's tendency to recoil from social interaction. This is because when 'people share enough of their stories, they begin to 'get a feel for' and better understand each other and the kind of lives they each lead' (Marshall, 2001, p. 130).

By creating spaces for people to tell their stories, the CAN WA team also helped people extend their contacts. In the policy environment we might describe this act as network building, social capital formation or partnership forming. Narrative work was also important because of its ability to help people contend with emotions, trauma and situations in a safe way. Combining storytelling with a public performance (playing out story amongst a community of

fellow actors) also allowed for members of a community to start to grapple with some of the more difficult elements of their future. For example, the themes in the community performance gave those involved a means of contending with subject matter such as the regions history of colonialism, drought and economic recession.

Story was also important because it helped give expression to community ideas in ways that move beyond reductive verbal, imposed and inscribed words. According to Watson (2001) too often those working in public policy and community affairs deem it necessary to translate what is happening for community into dry, empty utterances that mean little to local groups. The use of story together with performance can help people express themselves and understand others in ways that are more meaningful.

In this way performance is more than mere entertainment, more than education or didactic or persuasion. Performance is also a means by which people can contemplate and ruminate upon their relationships with each other. They are 'occasions in which as a culture or a society we

reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatise our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others.’ (MacAloon et al cited in Marshall 2001, p. 120).

Performance then makes it possible to move beyond ‘talking about community’ and begin to ‘do community’. Accounts of community life are rarely adequately understood through documented formal means, particularly of the variety produced by social scientists, social policy architects and other external commentators. In part this is because people find it difficult to articulate their experience of community verbally because much of what they need to express is not only encoded in words, but in gestures, music, symbols, metaphors, relationships, sound, rhythm, time, space and visual symbols (Marshall 2001, p. 135). Unless one gets invited to a performance of community life it can be nigh on impossible to understand a community.

Use of space, place and country

Another important element in the work at Coolgardie and Kambalda was the CAN WA team’s

sensitivity to and use of space (physical space, performance space and relational space). As mentioned earlier, the central aim of the project was to bring people together to explore how drought has affected the community and begin to think about how to improve connections between people during tough times. The aim of the project was centrally concerned with people’s relationship with the place they live in. Much of the workshop content involved exploring connections between the lives of people and the place they live in.

CAN WA made use of a number of different community and public spaces to carry out its workshops. As mentioned earlier, the project also helped create a space for community stories. Spaces in and around Coolgardie were used as the ‘stage’ for the community performance. Additionally, Indigenous ideas about and relationships with country were instrumental in shaping the project. Space was used as a metaphor, a location for meeting, the means for helping building trust between people, the topic for conversations about people changing their practices, a character in performances, a stage, an objective of the project,

an art gallery and a vehicle for helping people contend with their differences.

In many ways the country, its landscape, ecology, history, spiritual connection and social use was regularly personified in people’s accounts. In part this reflects the importance of ‘country’ in Indigenous culture and life.

As implied and argued in an earlier discussion of ‘back to country’ trips (Palmer et al 2006), for many Indigenous Australians, talking about and practicing ‘community’ is inseparable from talking about and practicing ‘country’. As Rose (2004, 153) explains, for Aboriginal people, country is multidimensional, consisting of an intimacy among people, animals, plants, knowledge, underground, earth, water, air and food. She suggests that living things associated with country have familial relationships such that ‘they take care of their own.’ Rose (2004) also discusses the temporal dimensions of country, pointing out that it has ancient origins and holds the future as well as carrying the present.

Importantly for many involved in this project, this means that to

participate in country is to follow along in a generational legacy that sees young people taking part in the country of their descendants both living and passed on. Indeed to attempt any kind of planning, community building or social action is a meaningless undertaking if one is abstracted from country. Work with, on and part of country is literally embodied in Indigenous culture and life.

Furthermore Rose (2004) says that many Indigenous people talk about how their country gives them body and vice-versa, so that they and the land are embedded within each other.

Also noteworthy here is the shared experience of country, particularly one that involves following in the footsteps of those who go before. As a senior Walmajarri man, Ned Cox, says, ‘Kids gotta know their country, gotta walk the same way as us’ (Binge 2004, 6). Cox points out that the opportunity to follow those who have gone before is critical in the healthy incorporation of young people into their community.

Another element in country is the important part it plays in maintaining the health of a community. Traditionally

Indigenous people have long considered the act of looking after country is also the act of looking after oneself and one's community. As April Bright, a Mak Mak woman from the Northern Territory explains, 'If you don't look after country, country won't look after you' (cited in Rose 2002, 25).

In their book on the history of Worrorra care for the Wanjinna, the principal creation figure and iconic symbol of North Kimberley culture depicted in rock art of the region, Blundell and Woolagoodja (2005) describe the Kimberley practice of keeping country 'fresh' by visiting, walking, repainting the old Wanjinna paintings and performing dance, song and story telling. Citing Woolagoodja's father Sam, they describe in poetic detail how in Worrorra traditions, young people would be selected by their elders to accompany them on special walks to visit the sites of Wanjinna, repaint these spiritual figures and 'freshen-up' country and enliven the Worrorra people. For others, doing work on country, particularly when it involves walking, digging, burning, hunting, harvesting, dance, song and story and other forms of 'community' performance, is to 'clean up the country' (see Rose 2002, 22).

This nexus between performance, health of community and land care reflect long-established ontological traditions that connect the health of country to the health of people. Rose (2002, 14) puts it beautifully when she says:

In Aboriginal English, the word "country" is both a common noun and a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, grieve for country and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, and feels sorry or happy. Country is a living entity with a yesterday, a today and tomorrow, with consciousness, action, and a will toward life. Because of this richness of meaning, country is home and peace; nourishment for body, mind and spirit; and heart's ease.

In a number of ways, the project managed to draw upon this important theme of a community's relationship to country, allowing it to shape the very themes and methods of the work.

Comparing the work with 'markers of success'

As was mentioned earlier, it is often very difficult 'measuring' the long-term success of a project of this kind. In part, this is because aspirations to increase 'community capacity' or 'build community' are difficult to measure in isolation from other influences. In part, this is because influencing community change is something that happens over considerable time. For example, it may be some years before people can establish precisely the degree to which the public performance of dance has been important for Indigenous people.

Therefore it is also important that we use the best intelligence about what is likely to contribute to community change as a means assessing the likelihood of success. In other words, it is important to draw inferences about the quality of this project by comparing it to what works elsewhere. As suggested earlier, if CAN WA is using practice that has been established to have been successful elsewhere then it follows that they will see success.

The report will now turn to a short review of the work

comparing it with the twelve markers of success outlined earlier (see Table 1) and based upon what the international literature says in relation to 'good practice' in similar kind of work.

FEATURE ONE: CONNECTING THE HEALTH OF PEOPLE WITH THE HEALTH OF 'COUNTRY' AND PLACE.

One of the key features of this project was the extent to which 'country' and place shaped things. As discussed earlier, from its inception the project took as inspiration the local landscape, history and ecology. In particular, the importance of water to the life of a community was the central theme. This has been a long-standing defining local concern in the history of the area, importantly influencing Indigenous stories for the area. In this way, the CAN WA team started their work by making the connection between 'country' and community central. This continued through the workshop activities, the community performance through to the book. In some ways one could say that 'country' was the central actor in the project, the stage on which the project was set and performed. As discussed earlier, this is a unique feature of this project.

FEATURE TWO: **ADOPTING A RECIPROCAL APPROACH TO COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT** i.e. 'GIVE AND TAKE' INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL PEOPLE IN GOVERNANCE, DECISION-MAKING, WORKSHOPS, OTHER ACTIVITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

One feature of CAN WA's work, particularly in the build up to the performance, was that it committed considerable attention to drawing upon community ideas about key problems and community solutions to challenges. This was done principally through a number of meetings with community during the early stages of the project, through its creative workshop program with students from local schools and through designing a performance that invited members of the community to participate. As one person said when asked to talk about the stand out features of the work, 'The artists and other project workers treated you with respect, we were involved in all aspects of things and Barb and Lockie were constantly checking things with us' (evaluation records 2008).

FEATURE THREE: **ADOPTING AN APPROACH WHERE LOCAL (INDIGENOUS) CONCEPTUAL IDEAS LEAD PROGRAM ORGANISATION.**

There is solid evidence that the project was sensitive to local

ideas and conceptual devices. As mentioned, the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous use of water in the area provided the central theme. This is most certainly a key theme in the lives of the community. People's individual and collective stories were the topic of workshops, creative production, the performance and the book. The script for the performance of Rock Hole Long Pipe has been considerably shaped by local Indigenous accounts. Senior Indigenous people gave directions on all manner of content including locations, stories, people and themes to be included. The inclusion of the performance of an Indigenous dance that has not been publicly performed for some time demonstrates influence of considerable magnitude.

FEATURE FOUR: **ADOPTING A HEALTHY AND VIBRANT LIVING APPROACH, MAXIMISING LOCAL PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT, HOUSING, HEALTH CARE, TRAINING, SPORT, RECREATION, SOCIAL ACTIVITY AND ARTS.**

Although this project was relatively short in its duration, there is some evidence that in indirect ways it encouraged people to maintain a focus on their health and wellbeing.

As mentioned the project had measurable success in getting different groups of people to come together and work on something of shared interest. It also helped create opportunities for other organisations to work together. Evidence from elsewhere demonstrates that if these kind of connections can be sustained these members of the community are more likely to enjoy better health. There is some early evidence that people have built on these connections and work with others to further involve themselves in other projects to tackle local social issues such as family violence and poor community health.

There is also some evidence that community participation in the Rock Hole project has directly influenced people's individual lives in positive ways. According to one or two local sources, some young people have improved their involvement in schooling since their participation in the project. Some adults are now more directly involved in local organisations such as the Western Desert Kidney Project.

It also appears that a few young people have become more interested in a future in the arts. There is certainly evidence that

the project assisted the capacity of local schools. Having artists work with students at almost no cost to the schools was very much appreciated by teaching staff. This allowed schools to better meet their obligations in providing quality curriculum experiences in the areas of arts education, science, the environment and social studies. It also provided valuable knowledge, extended the contacts and increased the repertoire of early career teachers.

FEATURE FIVE: **EXTENDING THE SOCIAL AND SKILLS REPERTOIRE OF STRUGGLING MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY AND ENCOURAGING THEM TO SEEK EXCELLENCE AND HIGH QUALITY WORK.**

One important aspiration of the CAN WA team was to create the chance for local people to be involved in producing good quality art and performance work. This is by no means easily achieved when one recognises the challenges and limitations facing the community and the time and resource constraints facing organisations. Indeed part of the 'art' of community cultural development is balancing the need to support groups who are 'doing it tough' while attempting to create high quality art and cultural productions.

There is some early evidence of extending community skills and quality in the arts. The community performance was well attended, not only by people who chose to watch it, but also by over 100 people who joined in as part of the performance. All who spoke about the event were impressed by its quality. Examples of what people said include:

My wife described the event itself as spectacular. I think that says it all.

I think a highlight was the fact that it was a worthwhile production ... well done with fireworks and sound ... it was not dodgy ... in this way it has the potential to encourage kids to do this themselves.

The standard of this event can push students and others like us in the community.

It was a real high quality show, which is not something you get here often. But what was even more impressive was that they (the community) did something that can be achieved again. They didn't just bring in these wiz-bang things and then not be able to re-do it. The project showed us what we can do ourselves.

The fact that the show was of good quality and very well attended allowed for participants to be literally and symbolically

given voice. In this way they could be seen and known for something positive by others in the community (evaluation records 2008).

FEATURE SIX: DRAWING UPON ACTIVE METHODS, ARTS, CREATIVITY AND LOCAL CULTURAL FORMS.

Perhaps the central feature of CAN WA's approach is that it is first and foremost an organisation committed to encouraging creativity, performance and arts production. Throughout this project people were encouraged to exercise their creativity, draw out new artistic talents and extend their imaginative capacities. Often this involved people moving across genres, media and modes of performance 'playing' with multi-layered forms including animation, music and multimedia, banner, instrument and lantern making, make-up, props making, costume design, photography and acting.

FEATURE SEVEN: MOVING BEYOND ONE-OFF PROGRAMS OPTING FOR A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH INVOLVING PROJECTS THAT HAVE AN EXTENDED AMOUNT OF TIME IN COMMUNITY.

CAN WA's presence in the region extended from August 2007 until mid 2009. This represents an attempt on their part to signal their difference from many

other organisations offering arts and cultural development in regional Australia. This kind of presence stands in contrast to the conventional approach of 'touring' through regions for days or weeks.

However, it would be disingenuous to claim to the community that the project team had sustained contact with a community over an extended period of time. It needs to be recognised that the project's intensity was very much targeted at the two-month period before the community performance. The project also included time spent offering workshops, consulting with community and working with the community during 2009 to produce a book. However, for most of this time the presence of the Project Manager occurred in one week per month.

Clear feedback from the community during this evaluation was that for substantial social impact to be attributed to this kind of work it would be desirable for the project to sustain its involvement with the community over a three-year period. A number of people said that for deep and longstanding changes to have been noted in community relationships with one another the

project would need a longer life. For example, one person said,

I think if you repeated the event then you might start to see sustained community contact. It gave them an exposure to things that might improve their social circumstances but it needs to be sustained.

FEATURE EIGHT: CREATING A CONSTELLATION OF PROGRAMS AND SETTING OUT A RANGE OF ACTIVITIES TO CATER TO A WIDE VARIETY OF INTERESTS, NEEDS AND SITUATIONS OF LOCAL PARTICIPANTS.

There is good evidence that the CAN WA team has used a multi-dimensional approach, created a range of small workshop led projects, used a range of art forms and technologies, devised a principal performance piece, worked with a diversity of ages and incorporated people from many different cultural backgrounds. As outlined earlier, the project can be said to be multifaceted in its methodology, encouraging intergenerational and intercultural exchange, responding across social needs and catering to a number of interests. This is clear when one examines the project records, including reports, photographs and indeed the book. As one person concluded, 'there was something in this event for everyone, if you didn't get into the

frontline acting side of things then there was the animation, the lantern making or helping out with production' (evaluation records 2008).

FEATURE NINE: **ADOPTING MULTI-ORGANISATIONAL INVOLVEMENT, INCLUDING THE INVOLVEMENT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, SO THAT A WIDE RANGE OF SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES CAN BE DRAWN UPON IN CREATING LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS.**

Another clear feature of the way the project was managed has been the extent to which the Project Manager and Artistic Director worked in close contact with a range of organisations, schools, the local government and local families. Many of these people made very positive remarks about the extent to which they received support, good information and practical assistance from CAN WA representatives. For example, one representative from a local school said, 'you often don't get outsiders (organisations) coming in to do this work ... but when you do you usually don't have the ongoing feedback and information that we had from Barb.' Another local person said, 'an important ingredient in the project's success was that Barb and the other artists would keep up good contact making sure

we were in the loop.' Finally one local service worker said, 'I don't think I have seen any community projects that have tried to link Coolgardie and Kambalda. The fact that this project involved both was excellent. I haven't seen this tried before. This is extremely important for creating community capacity' (evaluation records 2008).

FEATURE TEN: **CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTACT AND WORK BETWEEN FAMILIES AND DIFFERENT GENERATIONS IN THE COMMUNITY.**

As outlined earlier, from its outset this project was motivated by the desire on the part of senior Indigenous people to encourage young people to better understand the region's history. Following on from this, there were a number of ways the project continued with the theme of working across the generations. Young people worked with visiting artists who ranged in age and experience. They consistently worked with people outside of the conventional teacher/student or child/adult relationship in workshops, creating props, and in the community performance itself. As suggested earlier, the performance itself examined the theme of contact across the generations. The community

performance was an evening that a number of people described as 'family friendly'. The book that records this event is full of photos that stand as evidence of the cross generational connections occurring on the night.

FEATURE ELEVEN: **EMPLOYING COMPETENT STAFF, IN PARTICULAR THOSE WHO POSSESS A COMBINATION OF SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE IN WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES.**

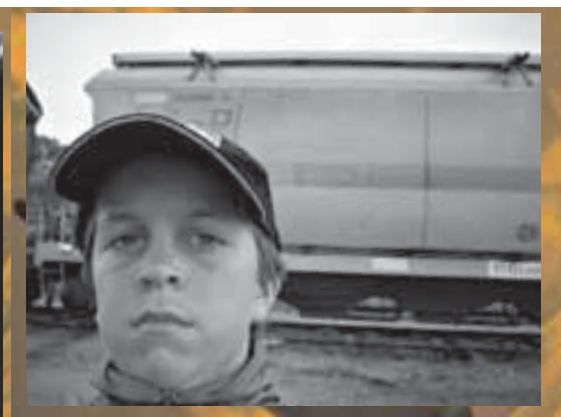
There is good evidence both from community perceptions and the quality of the work, that to a large extent the project's success can be attributed to the quality and talents of key members of the CAN WA team. The Project Manager and Creative Director were singled out for praise in this regard. In particular the project relied heavily on Barb Howard's previously developed local contacts, her events management skills, regular presence in the region, ability to work in isolation and ability to recruit community artists with a combination of technical, artistic and community work skills. Like Barb, Lockie McDonald also has a considerable network of local people given his longstanding work in the arts in the region. His experience in working with Indigenous communities meant that the

team had a vast stock of knowledge in relation to Indigenous sensitivities and sensibilities. Perhaps the two greatest professional qualities he possesses are rarely matched in the WA community arts arena: 1) creative ability to produce large scale community-based performances and 2) experience in working closely with regional communities. There are few people in the country that would be more able to carry out a project of this kind.

FEATURE TWELVE: **BUILDING IN EVALUATION AND REVIEW, USING INDIRECT INDICATORS AND DOCUMENTING UNINTENDED BUT SOCIALLY PRODUCTIVE CONSEQUENCES.**

CAN WA have established a range of mechanisms for reviewing and documenting its work. Both the Project Manager and Artistic Director maintained detailed records and reports of meetings, workshop and performance activities. An impressive feature of the working relationship between these two people is the regularity with which they met to support each other and review their work and 'pitch' new ideas.

The key artists prepared reports of their work. A comprehensive archive of reports, photographs and production material has been



kept. CAN WA commissioned this report in order to help it comply with the requirements of funding agreements and assist with its internal review processes.

As is outlined earlier, there is some early evidence from testimonials and observations from members of the community of the socially productive consequences of the project.

Talking about the opportunity for students to have artists from outside the school ('incursions') one teacher said:

These kinds of incursions are very important for our school because we don't have access to specialist arts teachers, we don't have access to these sorts of opportunities to engage in performance art. For our kids, that is something that is brilliant. It was fantastic for us.

Another said,

In this school, which has a significant number of graduate teachers, even the basics of arts curriculum ... such as exposure to a range of materials in the arts ... this project gave our kids an opportunity to have that. If you are a teacher and you are in your first year of teaching and you are not confident, you will stick to visual arts, painting, drawing. But the exposure to performance art, working in cooperative groups is

really important. Things that you might think are quite basic are extra for us.

Young people made similar remarks:

- 'It was all about respect.'
- 'We learnt about the pipeline, how to do animation. Now we can do animation at other times on our own.'
- 'Learnt about echidnas, how they were tracked, if they released it then people would be free.'
- 'The food was excellent. Steak burgers were good.'
- 'It was fun to be involved, not just standing watching things.'
- 'Fun, amazing, interesting, hardwork, opportunity, cool, wicked.'
- 'We had to accept what others had to say and had to listen to each other to get ideas.'

The Echidna from Rock Hole Long Pipe
PHOTO Poppy van Oorde-Grainger



CHALLENGES AND THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

In addition to understanding the successes of a project it is also important to consider the barriers confronted during the work and turn attention to the lessons learnt in order to shape future work of a similar kind. What follows is a discussion of both the challenges that stood out, how these were dealt with by the project team and observations about what could be done differently the next time this kind of project is carried out.

The major challenges confronting the work

In addition to the achievements outlined above, during the period CAN WA was involved with the work in Coolgardie, the project has been confronted by some important challenges.

In the early stages of the project it was announced that the major project 'partner', the Shire of Coolgardie, was confronted with serious financial problems. Prior to this announcement the Shire was experiencing a high

turnover of staff with some staff experiencing high levels of stress requiring extended periods of leave. Subsequently the CEO resigned with a new CEO not appointed immediately.

As one Shire representative put it:

The Shire's initial involvement was as a partnership. As people are aware, because of a breakdown of the organisation, it had to redirect its energies into higher priorities.

As a consequence of this a number of problems had to be dealt with including:

- Securing time and support from Shire staff who had previously planned to be involved in the project
- Readjusting the project to reflect limited resources available to the community
- A high turn over of Shire staff demanding that CAN WA representatives nurture new relationships, filling in people about the project
- Encouraging the participation of members of the community, given their shock, general mistrust and concern in relation to the management of the Shire.

CAN WA's decision at this point was to carry on with the project, largely unsupported by the project's main 'partner'. Eager to maintain at least one close 'community partner', a decision

was made to seek a closer partnership with the Coolgardie CAP School.

Other strategies adopted to maintain strong connections with the community included providing grant-writing workshops to assist in building up skills of members of community groups, seeking strong relationships with and between community members, particularly the Indigenous community who have a long-term connection with the place and are unlikely to leave, and working closely with the schools to involve broad cross-section of young people and parents.

This challenge helped shape the project in ways that may not otherwise have occurred. According to those who spoke about the relationship between the council's 'troubles' and the project's development, the 'devastation got people talking to each other.' It also seems to have got people participating a little more in public meetings, mostly to find out about council finances and the future of the region. Shortly after this, one local Aboriginal person nominated to participate in the Coolgardie Day Committee. This is the first time that an Aboriginal person has been on this committee. It also

appears to have prompted the more active public involvement of Aboriginal people. It was reported that, 'Aboriginal people had something to say that wouldn't have been listened to otherwise' (evaluation records 2008).

Another challenge confronting the project reflects the general difficulties and circumstances facing the community. This is a reflection of the nature of the work, given the dual aspirations of offering support to a community with multiple social problems while helping them create high quality art. This meant that participants sometimes brought to the workshops, performances and other sessions social issues and problems. At other times community wide problems, such as the financial struggles of the shire, the impact of the global recession and the death in a car accident of local young people, had to be carefully and sensitively dealt with by project staff. So the very thing that triggered the project, the day-to-day struggles of a community living in regional Australia, presented the project with some of its greatest challenges.

A number of people spoke of the general feeling within the community of being depleted of

energy. In part this reflects the day-to-day pressures of living in an isolated region. In part this reflects the conditions facing a community associated with the demands of mining, where people often work long hours, under considerable physical burdens. This has a roll on effect so that community groups often suffer from poor participation and lack skills to carry out their organisational demands. A number of people concurred with CAN WA's analysis that they often felt 'weighted down and overwhelmed by bureaucracy' and concluded that they 'no longer had the time to do the things that they enjoyed, which had prompted them to join a community group initially' (CAN WA report to FaHCSIA 2008).

This problem is particularly felt by schools and teachers who likewise expressed difficulties associated with their own and parent's overwork, the impact this has on preventing more active participation in community activities. The ability of local schools to retain teachers is both shaped and in turn shapes this problem. As one school representative said,

I think the reason why these sorts of projects are worthwhile

for our school is because we are in an environment where teachers have just been told that they can't remain in our school for a third year ... they have to either transfer or commit to another two years ... which for them in their lives is too long. We are going to up skill them using artists and then they are going to leave again. (evaluation records 2008)

CAN WA staff contended with these challenges by:

- 1) Locating the production team on-site for a period of eight weeks leading up to the main performance
- 2) Maintaining a regular agenda item on team meetings where local 'issues' and community problems were discussed
- 3) Keeping up weekly telephone contact between the Project Manager, the Artistic Director and key members of the community involved in the project
- 4) At times adjusting project plans to meet the regular contingent demands of the community.

In part these challenges were a reflection of the fact that CAN WA was only able to secure resources for this project and this community for a relatively short period of time. A number of people quite fairly concluded that it is difficult to make assessments about the project's capacity to significantly impact on the state of communities in such a short period of time, particularly

given that the conditions of their social decline were long-term and structural in nature. For example, when one teacher was asked whether she had seen evidence of an impact on the broader community, she concluded that this would be unreasonable to expect given that this project's focus was upon the creation of one community performance. However, she did have the view that the community would likely enjoy the fruits of community change were there more extended time involved in similar work. She said, 'I think if you repeated the event then you might start to see sustained community contact. It gave them (the community) an exposure to what is possible but it needs to be sustained.' This person's observations are certainly consistent with what has been found to be the case in the international literature. Research tends to indicate that for a project to be of influence to community change, (in contrast to individual change), an organisation would need to plan to carry out their work over a period of at least three to five years (see Mills and Brown 2004, Adams and Goldbard 2001, Bates and Rankin 1996, Wright and Palmer 2007, Palmer 2009).

As is the case with any production work, during the main public performance a number of minor 'hitches' or problems occurred. At times isolation and a lack of easily available resources accentuated the difficulties. For example, the task of transporting students from Kambalda to Coolgardie for the final performance became a major logistical problem because of a combination of local limitations associated with changing staff at the Shire, perceptions about the likelihood of damage to property, difficulties associated with CAN WA being able to pay a high bond for a vehicle and a lack of available options for a bus.

The project team was able to deal with this challenge by:

- 1) Drawing upon a vast network of contacts, largely gained through the Project Manager and Artistic Director's longstanding work history in the region
- 2) Keeping regular communication (through daily meetings) between members of the production team
- 3) Asking local community partners to assist at short notice.

Another difficulty confronting CAN WA staff reflects the lack, and degree of transience in, community services. During the course of the project there were very few community or welfare organisations with staff

or services committed to the communities of Coolgardie and Kambalda. In addition, due to long standing problems associated with chronic labour shortages, skills deficits and relatively poor employment conditions in the industry, many local governments and community organisations find it difficult retaining the services of their staff for long periods. As a consequence of this pattern CAN WA staff were forced to commit considerable time maintaining relationships with people in need of social and personal support. As one CAN WA worker put it, 'it would have been preferable to refer on people with personal problems and other needs, but often there was nothing or no-one to get the support from' (evaluation records 2008).

Yet another challenge confronting the project was that funding for the work came from a range of sources. This magnified the demands of reporting to a number of different groups, all with slightly different requirements and expectations. As one person said, 'this meant that we felt like we were constantly reporting to different groups about the same process, this takes considerable time and takes us away from the work itself. At times this

zapped the creativity out of you, something that is very important in this kind of work.' (evaluation records 2009)

However, there were a number of positive consequences borne out of the necessity of seeking funding from a range of sources. For example, it resulted in the needs and struggles of the community becoming known to a range of government departments and funding groups. It also allowed the project some flexibility in responding to social needs that might cross a range of bureaucratic portfolio areas. In other words, it allowed the project to carry out its work without some of the 'fixed' demands of only one body with its particular foci on one element of the community's challenge. For example, drawing upon arts funding allowed for more creative solutions than may sometimes emerge in projects with a welfare or community services focus.

The growing expenses associated with the economic boom as a result of mining and the global demands on fossil fuel had a significant impact on the project. A shortage of accommodation in Coolgardie resulted in significant travel between Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie (Artists' report). This

and the cost of fuel resulted in a comparatively large amount of the project's resources being committed to transport costs. This was always going to be the case given the nature of the work with participants living in isolated areas of the state. However, the timing of the rise of global fuel prices was particularly disadvantageous to this project. The team's principal means of responding to this challenge were to 1) use the rail service as a means to transport arts workers to the region, 2) set up a base in Coolgardie to minimise travel from Kalgoorlie (the main source of available accommodation), 3) wherever possible 'double up' the purposes for which a vehicle was used (e.g. coordinate staff with production 'pick ups').

Responding to these and other challenges in the future

Although many of these challenges were dealt with well, there are a number of valuable insights offered and suggestions worth making about how things could be done in any future projects of this kind. It needs to be noted that these remarks reflect the fact that many lessons learnt during the course of the project were immediately

taken up and helped shape the substantial successes that followed. As a consequence these observations will be framed as 'lessons learnt' from the project. They both come from the insights of a range of people involved in the project and are shaped by a comparison between this project and similar work carried out elsewhere. Although not intended to be prescriptive or definitive, the following discussion will be framed as general 'recommendations'. This reflects the hope that those attempting similar work will think about the kind of action that is needed to build upon the successes of this project.

Learning for the future

The evaluation process highlighted the learning that resulted from this ambitious project. Much of that learning may be useful to others who undertake similar work.

General approach

Future work of this kind ought be shaped by an ethos recognising that even the most depressed communities have considerable assets, strengths, success stories, talents and organisations capable of taking on leadership.

The practice of employing a mix of local and visiting artists in projects of this kind will maximise opportunities for local development of artists as well as an exchange of work between artists across regions.

When employing key staff, organisations undertaking this work should select people who have a proven track record in production work using a community cultural development approach. Given the shortage of people with long-standing experience in this regard, it is useful to consider creating

positions for Trainee Producers to work with older and more established Creative Producers.

During the early stages of project development of this kind, (for example when the proposal is being developed and funding sought), organisations should carry out an exercise of identifying local assets, local organisations and key initiatives already being undertaken by the community. This intelligence gathering exercise should include the identification of any potential 'competition' for resources between local organisations and visiting arts organisations.



Preparations for Rock Hole Long Pipe PHOTO Poppy van Oorde-Grainger

Digital photographic recording of projects of this kind should be built into the core elements of the community arts work. This will allow digital cameras to be used so that:

- 1) Community participants are given the opportunity to build their skills in photographic work
- 2) Photography be used as a tool for development (education, community narrative and planning)
- 3) Photographic arts production can occur and
- 4) Picture book reports (often known as 'photovoice') and other visual means can be used as a tool for the evaluation of the project.

Organisations should seriously consider only undertaking projects of this kind in regional WA when they can secure a commitment of funding for at least three years.

Wherever possible (and culturally relevant) local Indigenous words and conceptual ideas should be used during the process of naming projects, developing creative productions, building scripts for productions.

Training, employment and arts development

Organisations should encourage artists to draw upon local materials, products, resources and facilities so that:

- 1) Local economies are supported
- 2) The community can see how the work can be done
- 3) Local natural resources, places and themes can shape arts production.

The following qualities, experiences and skills are critical for those managing such projects:

- Experienced in working with groups
- Able to work with minimal supervision
- Capable of living in regional and remote environments
- Demonstrated compassion and respect when dealing with difficulties and difficult people
- Experienced in both arts and community development
- Experienced in carrying out production work.

Organisations should maintain a policy of ensuring that in projects of this kind, particularly where there is significant participation of Indigenous people, male and female project workers are employed to contend with sensitivities associated with the gender division of roles in Indigenous communities.

Organisations should employ Indigenous staff in all elements of the production work but specifically in relation to negotiating local cultural protocols, language interpretation and liaising with the Indigenous community.

Practice and project methodology

When working with schools ample time must be provided for projects and workshops. It is important that 'one-off' workshops are avoided in favour of a series of workshops so that:

- 1) People understand how community cultural development contrasts with other forms of arts practice
- 2) Teachers are able to work with Project Managers and artists to incorporate the work into their term plans
- 3) Students are revisited and worked with over a number of occasions so that curriculum outcomes fit with project objectives.

At the conclusion of each community visit to a regional or remote area it is vital that project staff undergo a debriefing and review process. This should include members of the team who visited the area and at least one other organisational staff member.

In the early stages of a project in regional or remote settings the Project Manager should set out a plan for seeking out personal and professional support in the region. This should include but may not be restricted to identifying:

- 1) Cultural advisers
- 2) At least one professional partner or mentor
- 3) Police contacts
- 4) Department for Child Protection contacts
- 5) Local artists.

Where possible a range of events (arts events, workshops, social gatherings) should be organised to maximise physical contact between members of a 'community' who live in geographic isolation from one another. In addition, new forms of technology (e.g. website production, Facebook, blogging, Skype, social networking platforms) should be used to encourage 'virtual' community building across geographic distance.

An evaluation process should be built into the earliest possible stages of projects so that those involved (evaluators) have the opportunity to observe workshops processes, planning of productions and arts events as they emerge, as well as shaping the development of the project through its various stages.

Where appropriate, 'stagger in' a team of visiting artists so that the community does not feel threatened by the sudden emergence of a team of outsiders.

Conclusion

Designing and carrying out social programmes that seek to improve the lives of communities is one of public policy's greatest challenges. It is also frequently very difficult to know when success has been achieved. Nowhere is this more so than in work that is:

- carried out in regional areas
- designed to encourage long term changes in community circumstances
- involves creating improved conditions for Indigenous Australians
- testing out novel approaches such as the use of arts, performance and cultural development.

The fact is that assessing this work is as artful as the work itself.

Notwithstanding these challenges, in this case there is good early evidence that CAN WA has managed to achieve some important things in its work with the people of Coolgardie and Kambalda. CAN WA has achieved well, in relation to the key objectives as outlined in project plans. In addition, a number of other important and positive outcomes have been achieved. In particular the CAN WA team has established contact and worked intimately

with considerable numbers of children, young people and others in the community, promoted the program well and, together with the community, carried out some high quality arts workshops, produced a beautiful, well attended and important community performance and created a visually stunning, poetically written and useful book that has helped the people of Coolgardie and Kambalda tell an important story about their lives.

Without exception, all who were present and/or involved in the community performance took the view that Rock Hole Long Pipe was one of the most successful community events staged in recent Coolgardie history.

Early indications are that CAN WA's work stands as a solid example of community-based cultural development, with a number of impressive examples of participants and community members taking on important roles in planning and carrying out the work. The team routinely worked closely with other local organisations and key individuals. They used an assortment of art forms that had the dual effect of helping create a dynamic performance and offering participants choice. All of this

has occurred with participants joining talented arts workers and nationally acclaimed artists and performers in the production of Rock Hole Long Pipe.

At the beginning of her foreword to the book, *Captain Cool Gudia, the Monster and the Girl: the story of the Rock Hole Long Pipe Project*, the Hon. Jenny Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs reminds us that, 'stories and storytelling are at the core of our identity – they define and strengthen our sense of who we are and where we fit in the world.'

The literature confirms that this is right (see Shaw 2007, Perlstein 1998–99). However storytelling, particularly storytelling of the kind that involves people in using a multitude of forms including dance, art and public performance, can help communities in other important ways (Mulligan 2007, Mills 2007 and Conquergood 2007).

As Leena, one of the characters in the performance, points out, people learn about others by listening and watching other's stories. When you share your story with others, when you tell it, when you listen to it, you start to move outwardly, you start to move from isolation towards social connections.

As the community arts organisation Big hART so eloquently put it: 'It is harder to hurt someone if you know their story' (cited in Palmer 2009). Or as one person involved in this project put it:

when you listen to each other's stories you are more likely to treat each other well.

From the evidence available during this evaluation, those participating in this project have been involved in something that is not only beautiful, it has helped provide practical ways for people to treat each other well. This represents perhaps the core ingredient to help keep community and country alive.



VOICES of the Wheatbelt project:

An evaluation of study

Written by Christopher Sonn

LEFT Voices of the Wheatbelt PHOTO Georgianna Crane

Background and Aims

The aim of this evaluation was to explore the outcomes of the VOICES of the Wheatbelt project (VOICES). VOICES was initiated by Community Arts Network Western Australia (CAN WA) and was funded under the Stronger Families and Communities, Local Answers strategies of the Australian Government Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). This project followed on from existing initiatives in the Eastern Wheatbelt, including the establishment of the Kellerberrin Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development Unit and a Youth Arts initiative that used photography in that community. Specifically, VOICES, the largest community arts project undertaken to date by CAN WA, set out to strengthen and build relationships with and between families, focusing on relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous families, to build social capital, and foster a sense of belonging and cohesion of communities in Merredin, Kellerberrin, Quairading, and Tammin.

Voices of the Wheatbelt PHOTO Mikaela Garlett

Data Gathering

This report documents some of the processes and outcomes of the project from the perspectives of participants, facilitators and other key stakeholders.

A collaborative framework guided the two-phase process for information gathering. This included consulting with key project staff to develop an evaluation plan, visits to two sites and interviews with participants and other relevant stakeholders including teachers, community members, and local government officials. Data sources also included feedback sheets (individual and group feedback) that were completed by those who participated in the feedback workshops that were held in Merredin, Kellerberrin, Quairading, and Tammin. The data was compiled and analysed for recurring and unique themes with a view to assess processes and outcomes in relation to the key objectives as well as new and unanticipated outcomes of the project.

Findings

Findings suggest that the various activities, processes and phases of the project all contributed to positive outcomes

for participants. In particular, the opportunities to participate in the photography workshops and related activities had benefits for individuals and their communities. These benefits included:

- Acquisition of technical skills and knowledge about photography
- Personal sense of achievement and growth
- Improved and strengthened social relations amongst participants
- Establishment of new relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people
- The creation of community-based photography clubs.

The opportunity to create art through photography enabled people to recognise their own creative potential and the ability to express themselves. The photographs, and the process of eliciting the photographs, also generated opportunities for people to construct new and shared understandings of their communities. This included revitalised connections with nature and people.

Broader public engagement

As part of the project, young people from the different communities had their photos exhibited at the Keela Dreaming Festival and also the Wheatbelt Cultural Festival that was held in

Northam. The project culminated in a photography exhibition held at Kidogo Art House in Fremantle. A selection of photographs from a library of 26,000 images, taken by more than 140 participants, was exhibited. The exhibition was attended by more than 150 people on the day and also served as the launch of the VOICES of the Wheatbelt publication. Together with the subsequent media coverage, these events served a fundamental role in demonstrating to those involved in the project their own creative potential, their own abilities to create art, to tell a story and to be heard. These public events also played a fundamental role in raising awareness about Wheatbelt communities and thereby enhanced the connections between the city and the Wheatbelt. Other events related to the community cultural development activities and CAN WA's involvement in the community included the second Unity Walk in Quairading, which brought together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and provided an opportunity for Aboriginal people to be honoured. Significantly, the Badjaling Noongar Cultural Festival celebrated Indigenous culture and invited back those who had been

born at Badjaling Mission site or lived there over the years.

Lessons

VOICES highlights the important role that community cultural development and arts practices can play in bringing together different sections of communities to create, share and express stories, and in the process cultivate community. The project is strategic and needs to be understood as part of a longer term, ongoing engagement by CAN WA with communities in the region. It is particularly important because it makes a point of including Indigenous people in all activities and settings, with a focus on forging new connections between people. Furthermore, VOICES illustrates the importance of collaborative frameworks for community engagement based on the principles of inclusive and democratic ways of working with communities. Central to this engagement is the key role of Indigenous leaders and community members in facilitating access to community, establishing trust, mentoring non-Indigenous workers, and role modelling partnerships. These engagements take place within the acknowledged social, cultural,

geographical contexts and history of race relations surrounding the lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in different community locales. Situating the project in this context is important because there are different and very powerful narratives structuring the lives and aspirations of both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people in the towns taking part in the project. For some there are clear pathways for schooling and transitions into meaningful social roles and for some there are negative scripts and expectations to not succeed. The project provides a basis for beginning to work through and rethink some of these dimensions of community life.

The evaluation illustrates the possibilities for external agencies to partner with local communities in addressing social exclusion and working on strengthening communities. However, this does not happen without challenges for the agency and the communities. In order to sustain this work it is imperative that CAN WA continues to develop a framework for community cultural development and arts practice that is sensitive to contexts and histories of race relations, that includes a

commitment to anti-racism and empowerment-oriented fieldwork. This will have implications for the organisation, staff and the communities. After all, engaging with and transforming people and communities through arts practice in places tainted by racism and other social asymmetries is difficult and emotional work. It is essential that CAN WA continues to build on existing policies and practices that will foster and support its staff (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in working for social change.

Introduction

'Today, in the present, as we think on our past, we have a duty to invent the future. This duty will be the task of these centres, units, or nuclei: to invent the future, rather than await it'. (Boal, 1998, p. 180)

In this report we consider some of what people had to say about the VOICES of the Wheatbelt project and their perceptions of its impact upon them and their communities. For most of the participants, involvement in the project was a positive experience. The key idea of the project was that spaces were created for mutual learning and engagement, for sharing and telling stories about the everyday and the

extraordinary in the daily lives of community members, using photography. However, for many, the basic knowledge and skills of photography were by far the most frequently named beneficial outcomes. Some people also mentioned that the opportunity to participate meant coming together, being with others and doing things together, which they found greatly rewarding. This report presents outcomes of this project from the vantage points of the participants, program facilitators and the evaluator.

Overview of CAN WA's work in the Wheatbelt

The aim of this evaluation was to engage in an open inquiry to explore the outcomes of the VOICES of the Wheatbelt project. The project was funded under the Stronger Families, Stronger Communities Local Answers strategy of the Australian Government Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). This project followed on from existing initiatives in the Eastern Wheatbelt, including the establishment of the Kellerberrin Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development Unit (see Green

& Sonn, 2008) and a Youth Arts initiative that used photography. Specifically, the VOICES project, the largest community arts project undertaken to date by Community Arts Network Western Australia (CAN WA), set out to strengthen and build relationships with and between families, focus on relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous families, build capital, and foster a sense of belonging and cohesion of communities in Merredin, Kellerberrin, Quairading and Tammin.

In view of the broader processes of community cultural development that inform CAN WA's practices and the aims of the VOICES project, this report also draws on empowerment and participation as key conceptual tools to help guide the analysis of the data gathered for the evaluation of the VOICES of the Wheatbelt project. In the following section there is a brief demographic summary of the communities in the Wheatbelt. This is followed by an outline of the VOICES of the Wheatbelt project, the evaluation phases and the findings of the evaluation.

The communities in the Wheatbelt

The Wheatbelt region of Western Australia is an area twice the size of Tasmania. It comprises 44 shires, 170 communities and a population of 72,431. It covers 154,862 square kilometres, extending southeast from Perth. The towns involved in this project included Merredin, Kellerberrin, Tammin and Quairading.

Merredin

The town of Merredin, situated in the central Wheatbelt region, is centrally located between Perth and Kalgoorlie: 257kms from Perth (via the Great Eastern Highway) and 334kms from Kalgoorlie. The Shire of Merredin covers an area of 3,372 square kilometres.

According to the 2006 census Merredin has a population of 3,247 (51.3% males and 48.7% females). Of this total population; 4.8% were Indigenous persons, compared with 2.3% Indigenous persons nationally, 22.0% of the Merredin population were children aged between 0-14 years, and 23.7% were persons aged 55 years and over, with the median age being 36 years (ABS, 2006).

At the time of the census, 1,634 Merredin residents aged 15 years and over were in the

labour force. Of these, 67.0% were employed full-time, 24.5% were employed part-time. 3.5% of this age group stated that they were unemployed. There were 723 people in Merredin aged 15 years and over who were not in the labour force at the time of the census.

Kellerberrin

Kellerberrin, also of the central Wheatbelt region of Western Australia, is located 203 km east of Perth on the Great Eastern Highway. The Shire covers an area of 1,917 square kilometres. According to the 2006 census, Kellerberrin has a population of 1,183 (50.0% males and 50.0% females). Of the total population in Kellerberrin, 10.1% were Indigenous persons, 21.6% of the population were children aged between 0-14 years, and 30.9% were persons aged 55 years and over, with a median age of 42 years.

During the census, 509 Kellerberrin residents aged 15 years and over were in the labour force. Of these, 56.0% were employed full-time, 31.8% were employed part-time, 1.8% stated they were employed but away from work, 4.7% were employed but did not state their hours worked and 5.7% were

unemployed. There were 365 people of Kellerberrin, 15 years and over, who stated that they were not in the labour force (ABS, 2009).

Tammin

Tammin is located 184 km east of Perth on the Great Eastern Highway. In the 2006 Census, there were 391 persons usually resident in Tammin: 54.2% were males and 45.8% were females. Of the total population in Tammin, 13.8% were Indigenous persons, 26.1% of the population were children aged between 0-14 years, and 25.6% were persons aged 55 years and over. The median age of persons in Tammin was 38 years. The statistics show that five percent of the population was unemployed.

Quairading

Quairading is located 163 kilometres east of Perth in Western Australia's Wheatbelt, with a population of 1,022 (50.7% were males and 49.3% females). Of the total population in Quairading, 12.8% were Indigenous persons, 22.5% of the population usually resident in Quairading were children aged between 0-14 years, and 29.9% were persons aged 55 years and over. The median age

of persons in Quairading was 44 years, compared with 37 years for persons in Australia.

Four hundred and eighty people aged 15 years and over were in the labour force. Of these, 55.2% were employed full-time, 32.3% were employed part-time, while 6.5% stated that they were unemployed. There were 268 usual residents aged 15 years and over not in the labour force at the time of the census.

The VOICES of the Wheatbelt project: Stages, Activities, Components

The aims of the VOICES of the Wheatbelt project were to:

- 1) Strengthen and build relationships with and between families, focussing on relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous families
- 2) Build capital, foster sense of belonging and cohesion of communities in Merredin, Kellerberrin, Quairading, and Tammin.

The key strategies used to realise the stated objectives were photography and song writing - both creative means of self-expression. They are mediums through which people can represent their experiences, name, and act upon their social world. Photography allows

participants to engage in social activity and meaning-making processes (Purcell, 2007). Similarly, song writing offers a creative means for engaging with one's social world. According to Della Rae Morrison, one of the facilitators of the song writing workshops, 'Anyone can write a song ... it is a means of expressing and healing, a way of sharing the pain and joy of life'. Morrison commented about the process that 'Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal kids had a chance to learn together about history, land, bush tucker, the everyday and different people in the community'.

The VOICES project ran over three terms of the 2008 school year in the Wheatbelt region. Facilitator James Berlyn (2009) reported that Della Rae Morrison and Jesse Lloyd used 'their singing and song writing skills to capture and stimulate the creativity of the children'. The young people developed songs about their lives in their communities. Those who participated were from Tammin Primary School, Kellerberrin District Secondary School, Quairading District High School, South Merredin Primary School and Merredin Senior High School.

Della Rae Morrison, Vinn Pitcher and James Berlyn 'took on the role of implementing the syllabus for the photography component of the project' (Berlyn, 2009), which was designed in collaboration with the broader CAN WA project team. The aims were to introduce students to 'the rudiments of digital photography and photo-composition' and to challenge the students using tasks and 'problem solving activities to begin to develop an individual 'voice' or photo-aesthetic'.

Table 1 presents some of the achievements of the project, especially in terms of creating opportunities for participation. It also includes some strategies used to gather data about people's experiences in the project as well as those designed to give people an opportunity, through workshopping, to reflect on the meanings of the photographs that they took in the context of their communities. Data was collected at the workshops using a short feedback sheet and field notes. Additional information was gathered with telephone interviews with program participants and facilitators. The telephone interviews focussed on exploring people's overall impressions of the project and how the project impacted upon themselves and their community.

Table 1. Summary of Project Activities and Outcomes

STAGES ACTIVITIES	ACTION COMPONENTS	PARTICIPANTS	RESEARCH COMPONENTS AND OUTCOMES
PHOTOGRAPHY AND SONG WRITING WORKSHOPS	RUN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS IN PHOTOGRAPHY FOR INDIGENOUS ADULTS IN KELLERBERRIN, QUAIRADING, MERREDIN AND TAMMIN.	<p>KELLERBERRIN 3 INDIGENOUS AND 6 NON-INDIGENOUS ADULTS. 8 INDIGENOUS AND 5 NON INDIGENOUS PARTICIPANTS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18-60.</p> <p>QUAIRADING 6 NON INDIGENOUS ADULTS, 5 INDIGENOUS YOUNG PEOPLE, 12 NON-INDIGENOUS YOUNG PEOPLE.</p> <p>MERREDIN 3 INDIGENOUS YOUNG PEOPLE, 6 NON-INDIGENOUS YOUNG PEOPLE.</p> <p>TAMMIN 14 NON- INDIGENOUS ADULTS, 12 NON-INDIGENOUS YOUNG PEOPLE, 4 INDIGENOUS YOUNG PEOPLE.</p>	<p>EVALUATION OF WORKSHOPS</p> <p>DATA SOURCES INFORMAL INTERVIEWS, FEEDBACK SHEETS, FEEDBACK WORKSHOPS AND NAMING EXERCISES, PROGRAM REPORTS.</p> <p>KEY OUTCOMES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PARTICIPANTS IN ALL WORKSHOPS LEARNT MORE ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY (DESIGN AND COMPOSITION). • KNOWLEDGE ABOUT COMMUNITY. • INCREASED AWARENESS OF COMMUNITY INITIATIVES. • CREATION OF NEW SETTING, A PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB IN QUAIRADING. • LOCALLY PRODUCED IMAGES OF THE TOWN. • REVITALISING CONNECTIONS WITH NATURAL PLACE. • PHOTOGRAPHY MAKES ORDINARY EXTRAORDINARY.
PHOTOGRAPHY AND SONG WRITING	WORKSHOPS CONDUCTED ON WEEKLY BASIS WITH STUDENTS AT TAMMIN PRIMARY SCHOOL, KELLERBERRIN DHS, SOUTH MERREDIN PS, MERREDIN SHS, QUAIRADING DHS.	<p>TAMMIN A TOTAL OF 20 YEAR 5,6,7 STUDENTS INCLUDING 4 INDIGENOUS STUDENTS.</p> <p>SOUTH MERREDIN INCLUDED 10 STUDENTS, INCLUDING 5 INDIGENOUS.</p> <p>KELLERBERRIN DSH INCLUDED 15 INDIGENOUS STUDENTS.</p> <p>QUAIRADING DHS INCLUDED ALL YEARS 8 AND 9 STUDENTS = 40 STUDENTS WITH 11 INDIGENOUS STUDENTS IN THE GROUP.</p> <p>MERREDIN DHS 10 INDIGENOUS STUDENTS.</p>	<p>DATA SOURCES INFORMAL INTERVIEWS, FEEDBACK SHEETS, FEEDBACK WORKSHOPS AND NAMING EXERCISES, PROGRAM REPORTS.</p> <p>KEY OUTCOMES*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL PARTICIPANTS ENJOYED THE WORKSHOPS. • PROVIDED OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE POSITIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES. • ALL LEARNT PHOTOGRAPHY SKILLS, NEW WAYS OF SEEING OUR PLACE. • ALL HAD FUN AND ENJOYED GETTING OUT. <p>* More detail provided below.</p>
EXHIBITIONS AND VOICES OF THE WHEATBELT PUBLICATION	EXHIBITIONS INCLUDING ONE AT KIDOGO ART HOUSE IN FREMANTLE. LAUNCH OF PHOTOGRAPHY BOOK.	FAMILIES AND PROJECT PARTICIPANTS, GENERAL PUBLIC WHO ATTENDED EXHIBITION.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS THAT WILL BE EXHIBITED IN THE DIFFERENT TOWNS. • 1600 COPIES OF THE VOICES OF THE WHEATBELT PUBLICATION. • NEWSPAPER AND OTHER MEDIA COVERAGE. • INTER-COMMUNITY SHARING AND LINKING.

Table 1 shows that several schools and local groups (e.g. Country Women's Association, Yok Yurk), artists, photographers and musicians participated in the activities. Community cultural development is collaborative and involves linking different groups of people who have different sets of skills, knowledge and expertise, with each other and to local government and schools through the networking phases of the project. In some communities, the focus was on engaging with young people at schools and in other communities, key advocates (such as Elders, Community Development Officers and schools-based Indigenous Liaison Officers) facilitated Indigenous participation. These advocates in the community were central to involving Indigenous community members. Most of the participants in the different towns (Merredin, Kellerberrin, Quairading, and Tammin) indicated that they became involved in the project because it was set up at the school or through one of the community groups such as the Country Women's Association. Adults read about the project in the local newspaper, saw it advertised in the newsletter and heard about it at the Telecentre or through other community networks.

Outcomes

'Thought it was excellent. School kids loved it. Really positive feedback from everybody involved.'
(Tammin, Adult)

The findings used in this section of the report are largely based on the information gathered during the second phase of the evaluation as well as archival data that program workers gathered. The information was analysed for recurring themes across the questions that were asked. In the sections that follow, the themes are reported and quotations (which are italicised) from the interview and feedback sheets are used to highlight the themes. Based on the feedback provided, it is suggested that the core objectives of the project were met in different ways for different people.

The benefits of participation

The opportunity to participate in the photography projects had benefits for people and their communities. Based on the information gathered, we were able to identify what people saw as key individual, social and community benefits. These include:

- The acquisition of technical skills and knowledge about photography

- The personal sense of achievement and personal growth that was attributed to learning about photography and creating art
- Improved social relations such as connecting with teachers and adults in different ways and as equals
- New relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in different communities were forged
- The creation of community-based photography clubs.

These benefits can be viewed through the lens of empowerment (Cornish, 2006; Rappaport, 1995). Specifically, it is clear that different activities contributed to the development of skills and competencies for those who participated, in particular, in terms of expressing creativity. Equally important is that diverse groups of people were brought together and they were able to engage in mutually enriching activities that fostered awareness of possibilities for building relationships across age and cultural divides. Themes and comments offered by people from different towns reflect what they enjoyed about the photography workshops and are included in Table 2 overleaf. It must be noted that this is a selection from the data that is available for each town where data was gathered.



TOP Voices of the Wheatbelt PHOTO Percy Boundry

BELOW Voices of the Wheatbelt PHOTO Apryl Longford

Table 2. Aspects that Participants Enjoyed about Photo-elicitation

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION	QUAIRADING	KELLERBERRIN	TAMMIN	MERREDIN
GETTING OUT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NEW WAYS OF SEEING NEW WAYS OF RELATING 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I REALLY ENJOYED JUST GOING OUTSIDE AND TAKING PHOTOS AND THE TEACHERS HELPING ME' 'GOING OUT TO THE FIELD AND TAKING PHOTOS TOGETHER IN A GROUP' 'GOING OUT INTO THE COUNTRY SIDE' TAKING PHOTOS AROUND SCHOOL OR TOWN'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'GETTING OUT OF CLASS BECAUSE IT IS BORING IN THE CLASS EVERYDAY'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I LIKED GETTING OUT OF SCHOOL AND EXPLORING... SEEING DIFFERENT THINGS IN OUR SMALL COMMUNITY I HAD NOT SEEN BEFORE' 'THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN GOOD BONDING BETWEEN SCHOOL CHILDREN AND ADULTS'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'FOUND NEW PLACES TO MEET PEOPLE'.
BEING CREATIVE AND HAVING FUN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TAKING THE PHOTOS, IT WAS FUN EXPERIMENTING' 'I ENJOYED ALL OF IT, BUT MAINLY THE PHOTOS' I ENJOYED JUST TAKING ALL THE PICTURES' I ENJOYED TAKING PICTURES AND LEARNING HOW TO SET THEM UP' 'I ENJOYED JUST TAKING ALL THE PICTURES'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'TAKING OUR PHOTOS, EXPRESSING OUR IDEAS'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I LIKED THE PROJECT BECAUSE WE GOT TO WRITE A SONG AND TAKE PHOTOS ABOUT TAMMIN'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'DISCOVERED OURSELVES AS PHOTOGRAPHERS'.
LEARNING NEW SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'LEARNING THE BASIC ACTIONS NEEDED TO TAKE A PHOTO' 'TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF HOW TO SET UP A PHOTO' 'TAKING LOTS OF PHOTOS AND LEARNING HOW TO TAKE A GOOD PHOTO AND LEARNING HOW TO USE A CAMERA PROPERLY'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'LEARNING DIFFERENT WAYS TO TAKE PHOTOS, BECAUSE KNOWLEDGE IS POWER' USING THE CAMERA THE CAMERAS AND PHOTOS LEARNING ABOUT ANGLES AND SUBJECTS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'PEOPLE COME AND TEACH US HOW TO PLAY MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I LIKE THIS PROJECT BECAUSE WE GET TO LEARN HOW TO TAKE PICTURES AND WHAT THE BUTTONS ON THE CAMERA ARE FOR' 'HOW TO WORK THE CAMERA'.

The comments in Table 2 show that school students enjoyed the opportunity to be away from the normal school setting. They also show that students welcomed the opportunity to be creative, to have fun, and to work with others.

In both Kellerberrin and Quairading, all those who completed feedback sheets agreed that they developed their digital photography skills. One of the facilitators of the workshops reported that: 'What became apparent very early on in the ten weeks of the 'active' part of the photo-workshops was that all the students responded well to the camera technology and user-friendly functions provided on each model. Black and white, sepia and multi-shot were always popular choices.' The facilitator continued by stating that the students 'already had a high level of visual awareness and could articulate a preference for compositional elements such as pattern, shape, texture in photography'. A person in Tammin commented:

The help that was given was great, and learning the explanations for things in relation to taking photos, how to make photos was interesting. Learning about the right views, so many different types of shots, while everyone was taking the same shot, so many different ideas, different shots, we learnt a lot. We are very grateful.

Personal growth

Importantly, for some of the Indigenous young people this was an opportunity to excel, to be good at a particular activity and skill. One student in particular was moved by the fact that her photograph was commended and framed. A principal from one of the schools highlighted the benefits of the program for individual students stating that: 'The students also benefited individually from the program through building confidence and self-esteem in recognition of their own achievements. As part of the program's objectives, a significant percentage of students were Indigenous.' The students' photos, engagement, and their learning, was acknowledged with awards and certificates. These awards were important symbols of affirmation and recognition for the students.

The principal at a school in Kellerberrin commented that engagement in the project increased students' confidence, in particular those who were struggling academically. The project gave those students a sense of achieving because it allowed them to do good work and to be successful. He said that the kids showed that they

were capable through the photos and exhibitions of their work. 'The biggest outcome was the students' sense of achievement'. One of the adults in Merredin said that the 'Kids really enjoyed it – the outings to places in town. Kids got to see what is in town.' She continued stating that: 'I noticed in the workshops ... my boy was really excited ... he went up to the rocks ... saw different landscapes, a lot of different places. In one section, sort of, there was a lot of different things to see. It was intriguing.'

Social relations: 'It breaks down the silence between the communities'

Importantly, the engagement in the project allowed for young people and adults the opportunity of learning together about photography. A person in Quairading said: 'All talking about (the) same thing at the same level. No difference between the adults and the children'. As a part of this equality, older people realised that 'technology was not so scary' and the younger people were embracing and encouraging. A community member in Tammin also commented, 'older and younger people, varying age groups, and people new to

the community were brought together.' This was echoed by another resident from the same town, 'It got people together again and we need to belong in such a small place. We need to meet up, everybody becomes friends, fellowship, it didn't matter about age'.

A resident of Merredin commented that the workshops provided an opportunity for people to come together: 'There is not really much going on to bring people together. With the workshops it brought people together. Work together ... for instance, you might see people downtown but you wouldn't stop and say hello. But you see them there (at the workshops) and you talk ... about things ... about what photos you're taking'. The resident said: 'It breaks down the silence between the communities'.

One of the teachers in Quairading noted:

The project strengthened relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The focus was successful in exploring local culture, diversity, relationships and reconciliation. Students accessed West Australian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists, and gained skills in photography and music. All students had the opportunity

to travel to Badjaling Mission open day to show case their creative art work developed by them that celebrated the local cultures and increased collaborative partnerships.

A community leader and project facilitator commented about the ways in which the successes achieved by Indigenous students in the project had additional outcomes. That is, the stereotype of Indigenous students not achieving at school is challenged by the very fact that they successfully participated in and completed the program.

Community building and creating new settings

In all of the towns, comments were made about the benefits of the new setting that was created and how this led to the formation of new structures in the community. As a result of the process a photo club emerged in one community (and in other towns it was noted that there were similar plans).

Adults, students and newcomers to different communities are involved in the club. A community member said: 'There are now 20 people taking photos. We share these within community and use it to promote our town.' We can

now 'Tell everybody who we are through the communities' eyes'.

Another result is a further development of presentations to new community members with many photos taken by community members forming the basis of the presentations. This is a means of communicating with newcomers as well as existing community members. A community member in Tammin said that it was: 'A good idea, as a starting point, to bringing people together, as a way of getting people together, to get to know each other, creates this opportunity'.

A teacher at Quairading commented that:

The project helped me to provide a varied and extensive curriculum to enhance students' enjoyment of school and thereby improve school attendance. The demonstrated skills of Aboriginal students and attendance were comparable with that of the broader school population. Aboriginal students were represented at awards days in proportion to population. On the day of the course students were more likely to come to school.

A person in Kellerberrin commented that participation was educative because through exploring the environment the students were able to learn about

Aboriginal culture. This exploration may provide non-Indigenous members of the communities rare insight into Indigenous culture and a new perspective on 'Indigenous issues', which could potentially disrupt harmful and dangerous stories told about (not by) Indigenous people. This simple act of Indigenous people representing themselves and their communities through photos creates a space for critical reflection of taken-for-granted understandings and misunderstandings, and the possibility of establishing dialogue between communities. Significantly, it also provides Indigenous members of the community the opportunity to achieve in a society with so many barriers typically standing in their way. It provides a space for Indigenous children to take pride in their culture, and to reflect on their sense of place and, in so doing reflect on the importance of story telling as a means of reclaiming history. Such critical reflection and potential disruption of 'myths' and 'stereotypes' has the power to open up spaces to begin creating stronger communities, through the reconstruction and affirmation of identity and promotion of self-determination.

Photo-Elicitation and Caption Writing

In addition to asking people what they enjoyed about being involved, participants in the workshops were also engaged in a process aimed at generating meanings about the photographs that they took. These follow-up workshops were conducted with those who participated in the photography workshops in Merredin, Kellerberrin, Quairading, and Tammin. The workshops were structured and involved different processes including warm-up activities, photo-selection, photo-naming, and writing short captions for the photographs. This process is based on the photo-elicitation technique for exploring meaning and activity (Harper, 2002; Purcell, 2007). In the different towns both adults and young people from the local school participated in the workshop.

As noted, participants were invited to select a few images they photographed and to tell a story about those images. Participants in the different workshops said what they produced made them feel good. For some, the photos lead to critical discussions about dominant representations about

people living in the country. For example, one picture is of two men being playful, pretending to kiss. In their view, the image is funny, but it also is a means of challenging the dominant, often negative, representations of men in the country as 'hard' and hyper-masculine. In the different towns, many of the images were of landscapes, the physical environment, old and new farming equipment, and of the people in the towns. For the younger people, the images were often about school and life in the community.

The photographs and the process of workshopping allowed people to tell stories about their different photographs. The photographs also contributed to the ordinary being turned into something new to be enjoyed and it facilitated forgotten stories being told. In Quairading, for example, one story was told about how Aboriginal people used to gather salt from the pink and blue lakes, which was then sold to farmers.

The labels that people assigned to photos and the descriptions they provided are informative. They offer insight into meanings people constructed about the images (people, places, and objects) in the photos, the dimensions of

people's lives in communities, and also the knowledge that they acquired through the project about how to interpret photos critically. The photos are about the everyday, 'about everyday life, like winning an award at school, about our community, about our people'.

Table 4 includes a sample of the captions that people wrote to illustrate the process of photo-elicitation with a focus on meaning-making. For some of the young people, photography provided an opportunity for self-expression. In Kellerberrin for example, the young people took the opportunity to dress up and to take pictures of themselves and their friends posing in different clothing. Some took pictures of their friends performing activities, making funny faces and joking. In many ways this was about friendships and relationships between young people too. In the workshops they commented about the photos they took about their friends and what they liked about their friends.

Many of the labels and captions relate to landscapes, the everyday and the beauty of taken-for-granted aspects of the community and natural environment. Labels also highlighted the significant

Indigenous locations in the town. One of the participants from Tammin said that they learnt more about the community's history. This is a comment that is consistent across the participants who were interviewed.

Overall the photo-elicitation was central to the broader process of creating opportunities for participation and a context within which people could share personal stories and thereby create collective stories about the communities in which they live. It was experienced as empowering because people learnt about their own capacity to create art and they also began to imagine together the possibilities for continuing these activities into the future.



Voices of the Wheatbelt
PHOTO Damien Shenton

Table 4: Photo labels and captions

MERREDIN

MIRROR VISION

'I like this photo of mine because of the beauty in the photo. This photo is in my school, South Merredin Primary School. You can't tell it's me; it looks like an alien with a camera. This photo was hung up in the library of South Merredin Primary School. I like this photo because it's in my school. I like the shade of this picture. It looks like this photo has been taken many years ago in the olden days. I was actually standing far away - I zoomed in. I love living in Merredin!'

I'VE GOT A CAR

'I liked this because of the sepia colour and the setting and of course, the car. The solemn face and arm gesture seem to make an impression that I'm saying that this is my car and I'm proud of it.'

REBEL

'I like my photo because I like Robin Hood and the photo brings the rebel out in me. The photo looks like I am thinking up a scam.'

KELLERBERRIN

SAYING 'THANK YOU'

'For country folk who depend on the 'weather' to give them rain and sunshine, their faith is a very important part of life.'

A VIEW FROM KELLERBERRIN HILL

'This shows some of the landscape around Kellerberrin and what makes it unique.'

HAPPY AND YOW

'Happy young girl. Free Spirit. Easy Going. Joyful.'

THE BUSH WALK

'Love of the bush. Animals. Calm. Crickets and bird noises. No traffic.'

TAMMIN

FRIENDSHIP

'I like the colour. I like the background. I like the trees and the tunnel. I like the colour because it matches the tunnel. The colours are: brown, yellow, red and white.'

PLAYING SPORTS

'I like the way they are skipping. I like the colour and the background. They are doing different stuff with the skipping rope. I like the way they are all playing together. They are all enjoying themselves.'

WAGON WHEELS

'The old wagon has obviously seen better days. I like the photo because it is very clear. Nor very much emotion. The photo shows that I live in the country surrounded by old wrecks.'

THE GREEN LAKE

'I like this photo because the lake is near our house. I like the green colour in the lake and the shape of the clouds. It does show an element of the Tammin landscape, i.e., salty and dry'

OLD BONES AT REST

'This photo shows how old bones and dead vegetation create a peaceful resting place. Trees and animal bones make a contrast that shows how well they go together. Peace at the way nature comes to rest.'

HAPPY KIDS

'It's in black and white. I like the background because it has the pattern of fence and trees. I like that the kids are all looking different. It shows that Tammin is full of lovely kids.'

Communities visions and aspirations

An important part of the overall process was to offer participants an opportunity to envision what they would like to see happen after the completion of the formal project. The visioning is about setting action an agenda to ensure the sustainability of the project where possible, but also to provide an opportunity for the young people to express their interests, desires and social needs. This aspect is related to community ownership of what they produced and pooling of resources to identify opportunities that will help to keep the momentum that was generated by participation in the activities. Participants in the different towns offered suggestions for future projects and how they see this may develop. This is an important aspect of the creation of new settings and opportunities for social engagement and skills development. Some of the suggestions included:

1. Continue with photography workshops including more advanced workshops.
2. Going on excursions to Fremantle to take pictures of a different setting (see exhibition in the following section).

3. Develop a camera club - in one town a photography club was formed.
4. Create calendars, Christmas cards, and hold an exhibition.
5. Excursions and incursions with focus on different art practices.

A sample of other suggestions that were generated in the different communities follows. In Kellerberrin, participants indicated that they would like to develop the Ballardong Women's Choir and develop regular painting and arts development workshops and continue to grow the Keela Dreaming Festival. In Quairading, participants are working with the shire Community Development Officer to plan a film project looking at recording and documenting local stories and community history. In Tammin, community members are very keen to develop more arts and cultural activities, and in Merredin students articulated that they would like to take their photography skills further and try filmmaking. CAN WA staff are developing deeper relationships with the Merredin community and will continue to work with the Njaki-Njaki centre and assist with planning and visioning processes where appropriate.

Broader outcomes: The exhibitions, the VOICES of the Wheatbelt, and other developments

Throughout the VOICES of the Wheatbelt, participants became aware of their own power to use photographs to define and represent themselves and their communities, as well as learning and appreciating more about themselves and their communities. However, it was also considered imperative that these understandings and representations were communicated to people outside the different communities for the project to reach its full potential. To this end, aims of the VOICES of the Wheatbelt project were threefold.

There was a concern with:

- a) the effects for the people who participated in the project,
- b) with the effects for the community in which it took place, as well as,
- c) the effects on the communities around them who might also be learning new stories about the Wheatbelt.

In order to achieve these aims, the project included several photo exhibitions and the publication and launch of the VOICES of the Wheatbelt book. For example, it is noted in one of the project progress reports that a selection

of images taken by young people from each school was displayed at the Wheatbelt Cultural Festival in Northam. At the festival the Elders welcomed guests to the opening of the exhibition and spoke about their immense pride and the significance of the project to their community. Eighteen young people and adults from Tammin, Kellerberrin and Merredin attended the event. Some photographs were also exhibited at the Keela Dreaming Festival and this allowed people who had not had contact with the project to see the work produced. A committee comprising 35 local people and two CAN WA staff coordinated the event. Over 800 people attended and the feedback was very positive. Several young people assisted to set up the exhibition and greet visitors throughout the day.

A final exhibition and book launch was held in Fremantle at Kidogo Arthouse at Bathers Beach. The exhibition and the VOICES book contained a selection from the database of 26,000 photos that were taken by more than 140 participants. The exhibition ran for a week prior to the book launch on the 4 June 2009. According to the exhibition manager, more than 1000 people passed through

the gallery. Those who visited commented on the quality of the photos and enquired about the ages of the young people who participated. Some recognised the scenery, landscapes and other images of the Wheatbelt - it reminded them of where they grew up.

The launch was attended by more than 150 people. The attendees included the participating community members, young people, their teachers and parents. One thousand copies of the book were printed and all those who participated were given a copy. The book was distributed to all Western Australian libraries, funding bodies, arts and community organisations and state and federal government. CAN WA continues to receive requests for copies from members of the community and agencies around the nation.

In essence, the photography book and exhibitions represent a slice of the 'life of the community'. Importantly then, this dissemination, while increasing engagement and participation within communities, also opened up the possibility of creating representations that at a minimum help members

of the audience and readers to appreciate the experiences of people living in the Wheatbelt, despite visitors having little or no personal contact. In this way the photographs taken throughout the project were a way of capturing and communicating meaning, providing a glimpse of the social realities of people in these rural communities as well as insights into broader community and cultural narratives (Rappaport, 1998; 2000). Ultimately, it is believed that such an endeavour broadens dialogue with stakeholders who need understanding about a particular social issue, which may develop useful and effective responses to community needs, amplifying the voices of those who may be invisible or marginalised. Furthermore, this portrayal of the lived experience may be useful in stimulating public awareness as well as fostering future collaborative action.

This aspect of educating the broader public about the Wheatbelt, inherent in the project, was highlighted by CAN WA Managing Director, Pilar Kasat. In discussing the aims of the VOICES of the Wheatbelt project she said, 'there are a lot of stereotypical images of the

Wheatbelt as drought stricken, depressed and racist ... we wanted to provide an opportunity for people to talk about their place and sense of belonging in an area that a lot of people in the metropolitan area and other regions of WA have little sense of what the place is all about.' This was publicised in an article in *The West Australian* 'Wheatbelt voices soar in Freo', which advertised the exhibition and book launch and describes CAN WA as making use of 'the quiet communicative power of the photograph in a bid to strengthen rural relationships and bridge the bush/city divide'. The article further outlined other outcomes already mentioned.

In addition to some of the planned activities related to the VOICES project, there were several other community-based initiatives that can be viewed as spin-off developments related to CAN WA's community cultural development activities. For example, the second Unity Walk in Quairading, which brought together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, provided an opportunity for Aboriginal people to be honoured. Also, CAN WA supported the development of the Badjaling Noongar Cultural Festival that celebrated

Indigenous culture. People who were born at Badjaling Aboriginal Community or lived there over the years were invited back to the community. The day involved the sharing of Indigenous food, market stalls, live music and entertainment, which continued into the evening. Speeches and a silent period provided an opportunity for all present to acknowledge the hardships experienced and the strengths of all of the people who have lived at Badjaling over the years.

In line with the collaborative framework of this project, emphasis was on the use of multiple voices to document lived experiences and moreover, on methods that support rather than undermine the overall aims of empowerment (Kelly, 2003; Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, & McCann, 2005; Rappaport, 2000). The culmination of this project in the exhibition and the book, as well as subsequent media coverage, serve a fundamental role in demonstrating to those involved in the project their own power and potential; their own abilities to create art, and to tell a story and be heard.

At its most basic level the exhibition was fun and a chance

for kids from the bush to enjoy a trip to the city. Though as the culmination of the project demonstrates and as expressed by Kasat; ‘momentum builds behind that to bring people together and get people talking and so many other projects start to flow from those initial initiatives’ emphasising that ‘especially in times of uncertainty and economic downturn, affirming local culture and identity is absolutely an antidote for communities’.

Observations, reflections and recommendations

This section offers broader reflections and recommendations about CAN WA’s engagement in community cultural development projects and its commitment to engaging with communities in collaborative and empowering ways. These ways of working seek to engage with those who are often invisible in the community. There is a strong commitment to drawing on Indigenous realities, experiences and knowledge as the basis from which to begin addressing issues in communities and changing social relations.

Context, historical relations and collaboration

This project is strategic and needs to be understood within the broader context of the work that CAN WA has been involved with in Kellerberrin and Quairading (Green & Sonn, 2008), and more broadly the Eastern Wheatbelt. For example, the Seeding Creativity project is a longer-term, systematic, collaborative initiative drawing in multiple stakeholders, communities, funders, and other agencies to address social issues and to build community. The key point to highlight is the standing commitment to move beyond single short-term projects and to invest in ongoing systematic community cultural development initiatives that are holistic, engaging and transformative of exclusionary social structures and processes. In this case, the VOICES project can be viewed as an entry-level activity that is central in highlighting community potential and laying the foundations for new community building initiatives.

There are broader issues in the Wheatbelt region relating to the socio-economic circumstances, race relations and racism that must be taken into consideration. Although the issue of racism was

implicit in the objectives of the project, they were not articulated. There is sufficient evidence in the social science research literature that point to the connections between race, social class and participation. One observation that points to the broader context of the racialised nature of social inequality was reflected in the ways in which young people spoke/did not speak about their aspirations. In the workshops in Quairading many of the students (non-Indigenous students) spoke about the ‘natural’ next step for them, the transition to boarding school in the city. This was not the same for the young Indigenous participants. It seems for them the challenge is more about survival at school, to not disengage. The teacher I interviewed confirmed this saying that many of the young people will leave school and continue with further education. There are different and very powerful narratives structuring the lives and aspirations of both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in the towns. For some there are clear pathways for schooling and transitions into meaningful social roles and for some there are negative scripts and expectations to not succeed. If race relations are to be addressed as part of

the processes of community strengthening and building of social capital, it is important that the conceptualisation and implementation of projects name this explicitly.

Indigenous involvement and leadership

In terms of the current project, the roles of local community members, including Frank Walsh (CAN WA Indigenous Arts and Culture Manager) and other staff, who work and live in the communities are vital to understand the ways in which the local Indigenous communities are being engaged. The commitment to employ Indigenous people as part of the CAN WA team and to engage local Indigenous people at all stages of the projects is a vital part of the collaborative community engagement and capacity building process. Without the cultural knowledge, skills and insight into community dynamics that Frank Walsh and others bring, this intercultural engagement may not be as effective.

Logistics and program delivery

The workshops in all four towns were enjoyed by those who were involved. In Quairading, for example, participants were young

people from the local school and adults who were involved with the Country Women's Association. The workshop format worked well in that community. The young people were responsive and worked well with the adults. They spoke positively about their community commenting that they felt safe, knew everyone and liked the lifestyle. In relation to the photography workshops, they overwhelmingly commented that they gained a lot of skills and knowledge about photography, as noted before. The adults who participated also spoke very positively about their experiences. One of the key outcomes for them was the development of a photography club. Related outcomes include discussions about how new media, especially photography and the internet can be used to showcase photos and to present different images of the community. There were no Aboriginal adults involved in this workshop. This would have made it difficult to realise the objective aimed at bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Given future commitments in the region, it will be imperative to examine the barriers to participation, after all, this is the central objective of community cultural development.

The workshop at Kellerberrin was intended to be held at the Yok Yurk. Unfortunately it was not possible to use the building and the workshop was shifted to the TAFE building. This time there were more Indigenous young people who participated, as well as non-Indigenous young people and adults. Reynald McIntosh, who is employed as an Indigenous education support worker at the local school, assisted with the workshop. The workshop followed a similar process to the one in Quairading, but was a little more challenging for different reasons. For example, the room in which the workshop took place was too small and made it difficult to conduct the workshop effectively. The response included going outdoors, engaging in different activities with the group, and reading feedback sheets and recording responses. It meant the facilitators could engage with the young people in activities that they enjoy before doing the photography workshops. It would be easy to problematise the young people's behaviour, but in this situation a different setting and process was required to engage the young people in the process of reflecting on the photographs and their learning

as part of the process. The teacher who accompanied the young people to the workshop highlighted some of the issues in relation to numeracy and literacy and resource constraints in the schools and the region. This program was seen as a useful investment and targeted disengaged young people. It provided those young people with an opportunity to engage in something different, activities that built upon their 'self-esteem'. This was seen as a very important aspect of the overall process of engaging young people who are becoming disengaged from schooling. This project was a significant resource investment into communities that require more resources to be better able to provide opportunities for young people to engage in meaningful social and cultural activities.

Race relations, support and intercultural practice

The project was a great success and CAN WA staff should be commended for their passion, creativity, professionalism and growing capacity for intercultural work. However, intercultural work can be difficult and emotional work (Green & Sonn, 2008) because of power relations,

histories of race relations, and so on, there will be implications for both the staff and the people they work with. It is recommended that CAN WA consider using resources such as guidelines for working with Indigenous people and codes of ethics that have been developed for informing safe and respectful engagement. These are not necessarily prescriptive, but they may instead form a basis from which to explore deeper challenges and issues that may come up for staff and people in communities within the parameters of project briefs. These resources include the NHRMC guidelines for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People³ as well as the guidelines available from the AIATSIS⁴. In addition to this, it is suggested that CAN WA staff document both the challenges and positive outcomes of the processes for engaging across cultural boundaries and working for social justice as allies with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities as part of the process of developing knowledge and practices aimed at addressing social inequity.

APPENDIX 1

Rock Hole Long Pipe Project Evaluation Methodology

Much of CAN WA's work is well documented in reports, funding applications and many of the records associated with workshops, performances, and exhibitions. This has been instrumental in shaping the evaluation and forms part of the evidence used to make assessments. Indeed, the first method used was to carry out an audit of these reports and other sources of information collated by CAN WA staff. These were used for comparative purposes, checking claims made in one source against those of other sources. In addition, the evaluation employed the following other methodological devices to help understand and gauge the performance of CAN WA:

- A review of the literature concerned with arts practice and community cultural development
- An appraisal of media reviews and articles
- Some written material from participants and artists
- Interviews and discussions with CAN WA staff, participants, community representatives, local groups, artists and others involved in the project (carried out in Perth and during field visits to Coolgardie)

- Analysis of other data – workshop attendance, employment/training statistics, meeting minutes.

Three visits were made to the region during the final eight months of the project. During these visits a series of interviews were carried out with CAN WA staff, other artists, community members, funding partners, local government people, teachers and representatives from other organisations. In addition, the evaluator participated in a number of events and discussions that were part of the project, including work concerned with the preparation of the book and the launch of the book in June 2009. Over 30 participants (including teachers, Indigenous leaders, young people, artists, council workers and local community) were contacted as part of the project evaluation.

During the audit review process the most important guiding principal for making assessments was to seek evidence from at least three different sources. Using the well-established social scientific device of 'triangulation'⁵, three different 'positions' were sought to confirm or cast doubt upon the merit of claims made by CAN WA. In this way rhetoric and practice were compared and

the practice of CAN WA staff was checked to see how it matched with a range of other sources of evidence.

In addition, the open inquiry elements of the evaluation involved identifying factors contributing to the successful implementation of various projects carried out, factors that may have hindered the implementation of the work, and assessing other outcomes from the work that were unintended but socially productive.

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⁵ Social science has taken this method from the coastal navigational technique of taking readings from at least three distinct markers in order to safely establish one's position.

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APPENDIX 2

VOICES of the Wheatbelt Project Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation framework adopted in this project can be viewed as interactive and is informed by the aims of action research (Owen & Rogers, 1999). It is interactive in the sense that there was a focus on providing CAN WA staff with support to plan and carry out the evaluation and the evaluator took on the role of participant conceptualiser. The process and focus is consistent with action research that emphasises participation and empowerment in research and practice, and the lessons from this project will inform the actions and activities that are part of CAN WA's broader organisational brief and the ongoing initiatives in the Wheatbelt. In this evaluation research there were two phases: phase one focused on engaging with CAN WA staff to develop the evaluation framework and to scope the project, and phase two focused on information gathering in the different towns.

Evaluation Phases

Phase 1

The first phase of the study involved the development of

the evaluation framework. The evaluation framework was developed in consultation with CAN WA staff and sought to go beyond the standard evaluation sheet required by funders. This consultative process served to:

1. Develop a clear understanding of the program plan, activities, indicators and data sources
2. Introduce evaluation methodology to program staff
3. Support key program staff in identifying sources and developing tools for data gathering that can inform the evaluation process.

Phase 2

This phase focused on understanding the outcomes of the project where as the first phase was concerned with setting up of the evaluation. This phase involved field visits by Dr Christopher Sonn with Ivy Penny to two program sites, Kellerberrin and Quairading, where workshops were conducted. Data was gathered through participant observation, informal interviews with two members of the project team, and using workshop participant feedback sheets (14 responses in Quairading, 9 in Kellerberrin). In other sites (Merredin and Tammin) information was gathered using butchers paper for group feedback. The information focused

on perceptions of the process, what they gained, and what they would like to see happen next. Additional information used in this report includes follow-up telephone interviews with teachers, principals and community members in Merredin, Kellerberrin, Quairading, and Tammin, as well as written reports from artists and key stakeholders (Berlyn, 2009, Watkins, 2009, Wray, 2009). Out of a list of 20 contact names, we

were able to interview seven people via the telephone and using email. The interviews were guided by questions about how long people had lived in a town, how they were involved in the project, what they saw as the positive outcomes, what they would do differently and what additional feedback they would like to offer. We were able to speak with one person in Quairading, two in Tammin, two in Kellerberrin and two in Merredin.



Voices of the Wheatbelt PHOTO Danita Hayden

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Voices of the Wheatbelt
PHOTO Mikayla Ball

DAVE PALMER *bio*

Dave Palmer teaches in the Community Development Programme at Murdoch University. He also spends a fair bit of time in remote Australia, looking for examples of work in Indigenous communities that's having a positive impact on people's lives. In other words, he likes chasing stories about what's working well.

He's discovered that whether it's the southwest of WA, the Kimberley, the Pilbara, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in Central Australia, Alice Spring town camps or the northwest of Tasmania, the use of arts, performance, music, dance and film is often what makes a difference. There a number of reasons for this, but mostly it is because to work successfully with complex communities you need to be artful, use a repertoire of creative methods and learn to improvise.

When he's on home turf, Dave likes nothing better than to show students what he's seen, introduce them to living examples of community work and arouse people's imagination about how things can get done.

Dave often gets to travel with his partner and two gorgeous boys, lugging around swags, books, cameras, a MacBook Pro, a diablo and a poi.

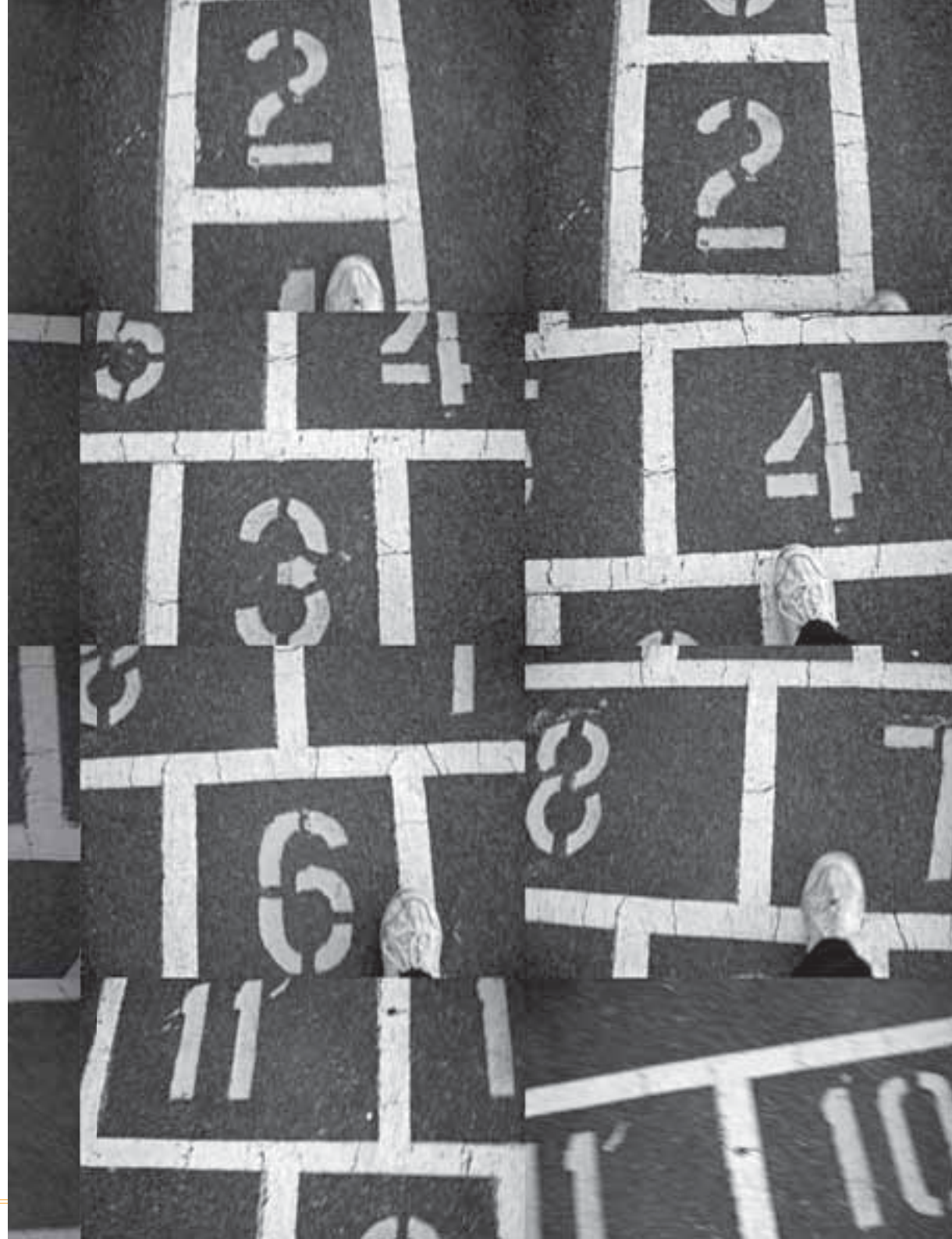


Voices of the Wheatbelt PHOTO Don Woodcock

CHRISTOPHER SONN *bio*

Christopher works in the School of Social Sciences and Psychology at Victoria University in Footscray, Victoria. His research and teaching is in the areas of community and cultural psychology with a focus on examining and documenting the ways in which immigrant and Indigenous communities construct opportunities for people to develop identities and engage in meaningful activities and social roles. He has a strong focus on promoting anti-racism in research and practice, and has learnt that the everyday settings where people come together are very important sites for challenging 'taken for granted' stories about different people in our communities.

Christopher has learnt that arts practice can be a very important means for bringing disparate groups together and to develop relationships is across boundaries. Creative methodologies play an important role in showing different ways of living and telling about the experiences of people in communities who are not always visible. He values the lessons he has learnt about humanity from those who are invisible. In his teaching, he emphasises the importance of learning from people's lived experiences, challenging stories and representations that undermine the integrity and rights of different ethnic and linguistically diverse communities.





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ACN: 106 364 407
ISBN: 978-0-9581235-6-3



Australian Government
Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

The Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs funded the VOICES of the Wheatbelt and Rock Hole Long Pipe projects and the associated research.



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The Wheatbelt

