



# *Putting people in the picture?*

The role of the arts in social inclusion

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## Introduction

This report was commissioned by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) as part of a preliminary analysis of the role of the arts in building social inclusion. The report is based on a review of international and local activity and research and an exploration of a range of activities taking place within the BSL and partner organisations.

## Objectives

The purposes of this report are to:

- identify the range of ways in which the arts are currently informing BSL programs and associated activities
- identify the scope of academic, practitioner and policy literature on the impacts of the arts on social inclusion
- identify common themes, significant contradictions and silences in this literature
- strategically inform the BSL's involvement in, or adoption of, arts-based initiatives in alleviating poverty through building social inclusion.

## Methodology

Information about BSL programs was collected via a workshop and follow-up face to face, telephone and e-mail interviews with relevant staff.

The literature analysis is based on a comprehensive international review of the role of the arts in social inclusion. The methodology included:

- a web-based review of policy material, organizational websites and case study information using the *Google* search engine
- a systematic search of academic and practitioner literature using *Informit*, *Expanded Academic*, *Proquest*, *Social Science Abstracts*, *Sociological Abstracts* and *Australian Public Affairs Index* databases.

## Scope of the literature review

The initial search revealed a very broad international literature that speaks directly or peripherally to the impact of the arts on social inclusion. This includes literature generated by policy makers, academics and community arts and community development practitioners. This literature focuses variously on social and/or economic impacts; impacts on individuals, communities, regions and nations; and includes writing that is 'arts led' as well as writing which is 'social inclusion led' (this distinction will be discussed in detail later). It is also informed by a variety of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, social work, architecture and planning, education, arts management, medicine, public health, public management and public policy studies.

In order to focus the review and produce an analysis useful to the BSL, the following discussion has been limited to literature which meets at least one of the following criteria:

- It is viewed as ‘seminal thinking’ on the social impact of the arts (as evidenced by the extent to which it is cited in secondary literature).
- It considers the role of community service organisations (like the BSL) in building social inclusion through the arts.
- It explicitly addresses the relationship between arts activities and social inclusion outcomes.
- It seeks to reflect on the implications of specific activities or programs beyond individual or ‘one-off’ effects.
- It presents a range of views, including those of participants, practitioners and policy makers.

The literature has been analysed using the importance of building social inclusion as its starting point. This approach reflects both the BSL’s organisational focus and the author’s experience as a social policy analyst.

## **Defining terminology**

The relationship between the arts and social inclusion is talked about in a range of different ways, in different geographical and disciplinary settings, and from a diversity of perspectives. Therefore it is important to first define some key terms.

### **Social inclusion**

The concepts of social inclusion and social exclusion have become increasingly popular in social policy discourse, since the UK’s New Labour government established a *Social Exclusion Unit* in 1997. The Social Exclusion Unit defines social exclusion as:

A shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. (Social Exclusion Unit 2004)

Social inclusion might then be defined simply as the condition of not being socially excluded. For this paper, I have found it more useful to draw on the work of Long et al. (2002), who describe social inclusion as measures taken to reduce the impacts of social exclusion in terms of specific outcomes (such as health, employment, education), while also seeking to address the broader processes that bring about such exclusion in the first place. In this sense, social inclusion is not a condition of being, but an active *process* by which the personal and structural impacts of socio-economic disadvantage are addressed.

Since the term ‘social inclusion’ is relatively new, to limit this review to literature that used this terminology would limit the findings. Therefore, literature which does not refer to social inclusion, but which refers to processes that have a common objective of addressing multiple effects of disadvantage, is included.

## The arts and community arts

‘The arts’ is a broad term which embraces many forms of creative expression. It includes visual, performing and literary forms, and ranges from the ‘high’ arts to community-based creative activities. The term ‘community arts’ refers to a specific approach to creative activity that connects artists and local communities in using the arts as a means of expression and development. In this review, the terms ‘community arts’ and ‘arts’ are used interchangeably, except where specified, to mean ‘active expressions of creativity using a practical skill to produce artifacts that can be appreciated’ (Kay 2000, p.21).

## Participation in the arts

The literature describes two kinds of participation in the arts. The first is ‘passive’ participation as audience or recipients of the end product of arts activities. The second is ‘active’ participation in the processes of developing or producing these activities. Throughout this review, ‘participation’ in the arts refers to active participation, except where otherwise specified.

## Community cultural development

The term ‘community cultural development’ has particular application in the Australian context. As discussed by O’Hara (2002), community cultural development describes:

collaborations between communities and artists which can take place in any art form. They result in a wide range of artistic and developmental outcomes. (p.4)

## Surveying the literature

Literature on the arts and social inclusion may be grouped into four broad categories:

1. Theoretical and descriptive case study literature (for example, Guetzkow 2002; Joubert 2003; Kingma 2001; Landry et al. 1996), which argues for the *potential* benefits of the arts to disadvantaged individuals and communities
2. Empirical literature, ranging from large-scale quantitative analyses to comparative case studies and single case ethnographies, which tests or illuminates the *actual* impacts of arts activities on disadvantaged individuals and communities (for example, Matarasso, 1997; Williams 1997; Balfour 2000; Lowe 2000; Goodlad et al. 2002; Stern & Seifert 2002; Long et al. 2002, Palmar & Nascimento 2002)
3. Policy and practitioner literature, which identifies effective ways of *evaluating* and *measuring* the social inclusion outcomes of arts initiatives (see Matarasso 1999; Dean, Goodlad & Hamilton 2001; Thiele & Marsden 2002)
4. Secondary literature, which *synthesises* the findings of all of the above (see Coalter 2001; Jermyn 2001; Newman, Curtis & Stephens 2003; Reeves 2002; Shaw 2003).

The following discussion draws on all these categories of literature to consider the impact of the arts on social inclusion. In particular, it considers the common findings, the key practical and conceptual problems associated with understanding the impacts of the arts on social inclusion, and the key principles of good practice in developing and evaluating arts initiatives to assist social inclusion.

The literature review is complemented by cameos of arts initiatives recently undertaken by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and some of its partners. Critical appraisal of these programs was beyond the scope of the present research task.

## Impacts of the arts on social inclusion

As discussed above, social exclusion refers to the complex or ‘multiplier’ effects of social and economic disadvantage. While the importance of responding to social exclusion is increasingly accepted amongst policymakers, practitioners and academics, there is limited consensus around the actual indicators of social inclusion. In this review, I will draw on an adaptation of Long et al. (2002), whose work on dimensions of social inclusion through culture, media and sport in the UK has identified seven indicators of social inclusion outcomes as:

- improved educational performance and participation<sup>1</sup>
- increased employment rates
- reduced levels of crime
- better (and more equal) standards of health
- enhanced personal development
- improved social cohesion and reduced social isolation<sup>2</sup>
- active citizenship. (Long et al. 2002, p.4)

In broad terms, current attempts by community organisations and governments to redress social exclusion include strategies directed at individuals who experience exclusion, social ‘groups’ (such as people with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds) who have been traditionally marginalised, and regions or neighbourhoods that disproportionately experience the effects of exclusion due to geographic, structural and demographic factors. There is a frequently repeated claim throughout the literature that arts activities deliver (or, at least, contribute to) a range of social inclusion outcomes to such individuals, groups and communities. The following discussion will consider the individual, group and community effects of the arts against the seven indicators of social inclusion outcomes outlined above.

### Improved educational performance

The relationship between educational attainment and participation in the arts has been widely debated by the academic community (Matarasso 1997). The present review of the literature revealed a fairly limited, yet generally positive account of the relationship between performance and retention in formal education and participation in the arts. In an evaluation involving a random selection of participants in a ‘learning by art’ program implemented within more than 30 schools in Portsmouth, England, Matarasso found that

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<sup>1</sup> Long et al. (2002) refer to performance only. I have added participation as this is a well-recognised indicator of educational inclusion in Australia.

<sup>2</sup> Long et al. (2002) refer to social cohesion only. I have added reduced social isolation as a ‘complementary’ indicator.

participating in the arts had a positive impact on the educational performance of three out of every four children (Matarasso 1997, p.9).

In an ethnographic study of a collaboration between a middle school and a community arts organisation to design a ‘peace park’ in an ethnically and economically diverse neighbourhood within a US city, Krensky (2001) found that the collaboration had a positive transformative effect on the students involved by extending educational opportunities beyond the classroom. In terms of social inclusion outcomes for communities (in this case, school communities), Krensky noted that a key asset of the collaboration was ‘a strong and beneficial partnership [between schools and arts organisations] for developing and implementing arts programs for urban students’ (2001, p. 442).

With regard to social inclusion outcomes for people from traditionally excluded groups, ongoing longitudinal research by Thiele and Marsden of Jesuit Social Services in Melbourne has found that sustained participation by at-risk young people in a community cultural development program—the Artful Dodgers Studio—has resulted in a pattern of re-engagement which sometimes includes a return to formal education (Thiele & Marsden 2002).

Two themes of note emerged from the studies of youth cited above. The first is that these social inclusion outcomes are often an effect of enhanced personal development of the young people involved. The second is that young people displayed great enthusiasm for developmental activities based on the arts.

### **Arts initiatives 1: Developing skills**

**School Community Arts for Youth (SCRAYP)** is a dynamic autonomous program based at Footscray Community Arts Centre. SCRAYP is based on the principle of giving young people the opportunity to express themselves through the art of theatre, and operates as a not-for-profit program in partnership with a number of schools in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The program employs young artists to operate as mentors with groups of young people in schools. Mentors receive training and guidance from Centre staff. Through workshop activities with these groups, young students are supported to develop their artistic product, which ultimately leads to live performances for their peers and community.

SCRAYP provides young people with an opportunity to express themselves creatively, which improves their self-esteem and enables them to connect positively with their schools and broader communities. Workers and schools involved with SCRAYP believe that the program encourages young people who might otherwise be at risk of leaving school to remain in school. The program also provides employment opportunities to the young artists who act as mentors, themselves often ‘graduates’ of the SCRAYP program.

SCRAYP is currently working with the School of Creative Arts at the University of Melbourne to evaluate the benefits of the program to the young participants.

*Based on information provided by Michelle Dorian, former SCRAYP Communications Coordinator and David Everest, Cultural Community Development Manager.*

## Increased employment rates

As Long et al. (2002) have pointed out, there is some difficulty in assessing the effect of arts projects on employment, as finding a job typically occurs, if it does, after involvement in such projects concludes. They suggest that indicators of ‘job-readiness’ (that is, improved skill levels, aptitudes and orientation) may more realistically reflect the impact of such projects on employment outcomes.

Perhaps due to these assessment limitations, there is not much direct evidence of increased employment rates as a result of participation in the arts. With regard to impact on individual employment options, Williams’ (1997) study of 89 government-funded community arts initiatives in Australia found that 49 per cent of projects generated employment outcomes. As both Coalter (2001) and Matarasso (1997, 1999) have pointed out in the UK context, community arts projects contribute directly to employment as new jobs are created to carry out specific projects. However, as Coalter (2001) has observed, these jobs are often short-term, part-time and project-driven, so they do not represent sustained employment outcomes.

With regard to ‘job-readiness’, the evidence is significantly stronger. Virtually all empirical research reviewed found that involvement in community arts activities improved people’s technical skills (see Williams 1997; Matarasso 1997), their communication and interpersonal skills (see Williams 1997; Kingma 2001; Krensky 2001) and their personal networks (see Williams 1997; Matarasso 1997; Long et al. 2002).

There is some positive evidence of the impact of the arts on employment for disadvantaged groups. A few case studies of projects—such as the Julalikari Arts and Crafts Program initiated by the Julalikari Aboriginal Corporation in Tennant Creek (see Kingma 2001)—have noted that project outcomes have included increased commercial planning skills, leading to the formation of ongoing social enterprises, such as workers’ cooperatives, which have generated employment and income for participants.

With regard to traditionally disadvantaged geographic communities, there is repeated evidence in the literature that development of the arts (both community arts and mainstream arts) has a significantly positive impact on local economies. Stern and Seifert (1998) and Landry et al. (1996) have noted that, in disadvantaged urban areas, community and mainstream arts organisations and activities stimulate local economic development by attracting new investment and diverse visitors<sup>3</sup>. In rural contexts, several writers (see Kingma 2002, Barraket 2003) have suggested that the arts as ‘cultural product’ are significant in generating niche markets and stimulating tourism in small rural communities that are seeking to revitalise themselves in the face of regional disadvantage.

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<sup>3</sup> Some writers contest these benefits on the basis that they compound gentrification, which creates further social exclusion by forcing disadvantaged residents out of revitalised areas (see Mattern, 2001). This reflects a broader argument about the nature of effective local economic development in urban areas which, while important, is beyond the scope of this literature review.



## Arts initiatives 2: Creating employment opportunities

The **BSL JPET program** works with young people aged 15–21 years who are facing significant personal and social barriers, including homelessness or risk of homelessness, transition from state care or the juvenile justice system, geographic isolation and refugee resettlement. JPET is based on a holistic one-on-one case management model which seeks to assist young people find innovative solutions to build a positive future.

Via the BSL Innovation Hub, JPET is currently exploring the possibilities of developing a film and multimedia program, *The Butcher Shop*. The aim is to build participants' experience of using film and multimedia in order to develop self-confidence, practical skills and social networks. The intention is to establish a training centre, which involves professional industry mentors. It is expected that the Butcher Shop will operate as a sustainable community enterprise, generating some income via training courses and equipment hire, and creating employment opportunities and remuneration for the young people involved.

*Based on information provided by Lee-Ann Boyle, JPET Coordinator.*

## Reduced levels of crime

Criminal activity may be seen as an individual effect of social exclusion. At the same time, high crime rates in traditionally excluded groups or communities have been described as the costly 'externalities' of social exclusion to local neighbourhoods (Calvo-Armengol & Zenou 2003; Roman & Farrell 2002).

The literature suggests that arts interventions have positive social inclusion outcomes with regard to reduced crime in two ways. First, some writers describe the positive effects of arts interventions on individual offenders. In a case study of a drama-based cognitive development program with violent offenders—the Pump Challenging Violence program—Balfour (2000) concluded that, while the program contained significant weaknesses, it did have a positive impact on participants' cognitive skills and capacity to reflect on personal behaviours, including criminal behaviours. Comparing the parole outcomes of ex-offenders who had participated in a weekly arts program with outcomes for all people leaving secure facilities in California over a five-year period, Cleveland (2001) found that re-offending rates of the experimental group were significantly lower than average.

With regard to community arts projects and crime reduction, Long et al.'s comparative case study analysis found that the anecdotally reported benefits of arts-based projects are that they keep people 'off the streets' and have positive psychological benefits that reduce individuals' predispositions towards criminal activity (2002, p.5). In a review of good practice in offender rehabilitation, Miles has suggested that the arts provide 'alternative literacies' to traditional forms of education, thus enabling the personal engagement needed to underpin attitudinal change towards offending for people marginalised in formal education (2003, p.6).

Further, some of the evaluative literature suggests that effective arts interventions reduce crime rates within socially excluded communities by providing a space for the development and expression of shared social values (see Long et al. 2002). This will be discussed under the indicator of improved social cohesion below.

It should be noted, however, that almost all writers indicated that the absence of effective evaluation of arts interventions significantly undermines the validity of the research findings about their effect on individual criminal behaviour.

### **Better (and more equal) standards of health**

The concept of ‘health’ is the subject of some debate; and social dimensions of health—including individual wellbeing through social inclusion—have gained increasing attention in recent years. The literature suggests that participation (including audience participation) in the arts has a number of positive health outcomes:

- It has a positive effect on the way people *feel*, which improves personal wellbeing (Matarasso 1997; Palmar & Nascimento 2002).
- It can provide a powerful vehicle for *community education* around public health issues (Petty 1997; Palmar & Nascimento 2002; VicHealth 2003; Matarasso 1997).
- It can have *therapeutic effects* on mental health and reduce harmful behaviours, such as drug use, self harm and problem gambling (Thiele & Marsden 2002; Palmar & Nascimento 2002).
- It can ‘*give voice*’ to shared problems for disadvantaged people and thereby transform concept into action around specific issues (Petty 1997; Kingma 2001).
- It can promote health networks and enhance access to health services by those who are generally ‘hard to reach’ (Long et al. 2002).

### **Arts initiatives 3: Improving health**

**The BSL HIPPY program** in Fitzroy has recently introduced singing and art as a means of facilitating healing and cultural connectedness for Somali refugee women. In late 2003, a workshop was held to encourage the women involved to sing traditional Somali lullabies with the assistance of a choir instructor. An artist was also on site to assist participants with expressing the feelings evoked by the singing experience through painting. A number of the lullabies were digitally recorded and older Somali women in the community are transcribing the words. A local school has used these recordings to reconnect their students—particularly those of Somali background—with Somali cultural traditions.

The initial workshop was very successful and the women involved were very positive about its therapeutic effects. Subsequent workshops have been less well attended, perhaps due to the practical demands of resettlement (such as the women’s need for training and skills development). Staff have reflected that, while activities that utilise the arts have much potential for healing and cultural connection, these activities need to be appropriately resourced if they are to be integrated into programs on an ongoing basis.

*Based on information provided by Barbara Tinney, HIPPY Coordinator*

While there are a number of case studies which point to the positive association between health outcomes and participation in the arts, evaluative evidence of such outcomes is extremely limited. Reviewing the connection between mental health and the arts, White (2003) found that the absence of systematic evaluation, including longitudinal assessment, significantly limited any conclusions. Hamilton et al. (2003) drew similar conclusions in their review of formal evaluations of the role of the arts in health. It is likely that the

relationship between the arts and health is significantly more complex and less direct than one of simple cause and effect.

## **Enhanced personal development**

The literature consistently reports wide-reaching positive impacts of arts projects and interventions on personal development for socially excluded individuals, groups and communities.

The most commonly cited impacts on individuals include:

- increased self-esteem and confidence (Matarasso 1997; Williams 1997; Long et al. 2002; Goodlad et al. 2002)
- increased social and creative skills (Matarasso 1997; Williams, 1997; Long et al. 2002; Goodlad et al. 2002, Kingma 2001; Thiele & Marsden 2002)
- stronger personal networks (Williams 1997; Long et al. 2002)
- greater capacity for reflection and/or strategic thinking (Matarasso 1997; Kingma 2001; Krensky 2001).

There is a recurrent theme that the ‘fun’ aspect of involvement is a critical element in effective personal development through arts activities.

### **Arts initiatives 4: Developing confidence and communications skills**

**The EMC/BSL Youth Refugee Program** involves case-work, group work, advocacy and research, as well as work with mainstream service providers to improve access to these services for young people from refugee backgrounds. Arts initiatives have been incorporated in a number of ways, including:

- drama workshops that build experiential understandings of power, leadership skills, public speaking and group dynamics
- movement workshops designed to enhance body awareness and relaxation
- the workshopping and painting of a mural by young people from refugee backgrounds, to explore and express settlement experiences
- in case-work to assist expression of concepts and emotions and exploration of (for example) family structures.

Within this program, the arts have proved to be a very useful vehicle to convey ideas, feelings and experiences for participants, many of whom have difficulties expressing themselves in English. The production of public art, such as the mural, has also enabled the young people to have their voices heard and validated. Staff experience is that, when integrated with other aspects of the program, arts activities are particularly useful in bridging communication barriers between cultures, communities and linguistic groups.

*Based on information provided by Sara Kirsner, Ecumenical Migration Centre of the Brotherhood of St Laurence*

## **Improved social cohesion and reduced social isolation**

Social capital theory and research (see, for example, Putnam 2000; Lin 2001) suggests that the strength and diversity of personal and community networks is a significant feature of resilient communities. At an individual level, people with diverse personal networks have been found to be in relatively better physical and mental health, have higher sustained levels of education and employment and greater sources of social support than those with very limited networks. At a community level, communities with higher aggregate levels of social capital are more likely to exhibit features of community self-reliance and have greater access to diverse resources, thus being able to respond to the structural and historical effects of exclusion.

There is repeated evidence in the literature that participation in the arts strengthens and diversifies personal networks. In addition, there are consistent findings that arts activities build social capital and enhance social cohesion within communities. As Williams has observed, the very processes of group artistic production rely on ‘identifying common goals, group cooperation and effective communication of complex ideas’ (1997, p.9), all of which underpin the generation of social capital.

A number of writers have suggested that arts and cultural activity is a critical feature of sustainable community development (see Hawkes 2001; Barraket 2003). Lowe (2000) and Krensky (2001) found that arts projects provide a space in which diverse perspectives on community conflicts or problems are expressed and potentially resolved. One of the key benefits of arts initiatives in marginalised communities is the extent to which these projects improve community image and community members’ feelings about their community (Kay 2000; Krensky 2001).

Perhaps most significantly, arts initiatives that bring together people from diverse backgrounds can provide a basis for communication and learning about others’ experiences. Lowe found that ‘by having the opportunity to express and discover common concerns, neighbourhood residents identified collectively shared experiences and enhanced collectively felt sentiments of solidarity’ (2000, p.71). Joubert (2003) has described this in theoretical terms as a process of building shared cultural values.

While arts initiatives often have a positive transformative effect on social cohesion, it should be noted that this effect depends on how they are designed and implemented. In an analysis of a city-led arts-based community development process in California, Mattern found that the division of arts projects along class and ethnic lines had the effect of ‘art ... acting more as a social wedge, dividing the ... groups, than as a social bridge’ (2001, p.302).

On a further cautionary note, while the body of research evidence suggests that arts projects have a valuable role to play in generating social cohesion, there is less to suggest how such projects draw in the most isolated of the community. Two large-scale evaluations of the performance of community arts projects in accessing highly disadvantaged people found that the projects had limited success in this area. Goodlad et al. (2002) found some evidence in the government-initiated Arts and Social Inclusion program in Scotland that arts projects overcame traditional barriers to inclusion, but also that the most vulnerable

people were often not reached. Similarly, in an evaluation of the philanthropically funded Community Builds Culture program in Philadelphia, Stern and Seifert (2002) found that, while the program increased overall participation in cultural activity by more than 30 per cent, it did not significantly increase participation by residents from disadvantaged areas of the city. They did note, however, that the 'baseline involvement' of community arts organisations in disadvantaged areas was relatively high, so that a lack of improvement partly reflected their already strong involvement with marginalised communities.

### **Arts initiatives 5: Reducing social isolation**

**Brotherhood Community Care** is using the creative arts to help socially isolated older people and people with disabilities to connect with their community.

The program arose as a response to clients telling their Care Managers that they wanted to be involved in more social activities during the day. Clients wanted activities that were more closely aligned to their personal interests.

A large number of clients had an active interest in the creative arts, particularly art and craft, as well as music. As a result Brotherhood Community Care (BCC) developed a partnership with the Art Shed, a local gallery, to offer an eight-week art and craft course.

The course has been running for 6 months and clients come from a range of backgrounds, ages and disabilities. The student intake includes people with dementia, multiple sclerosis and complex health problems, and family carers. Despite these differences, friendships have developed and a new-found confidence has encouraged many to access local community art groups. There are plans for an exhibition in early 2005.

In addition BCC, in partnership with Anglicare and Southern Cross Care, are running monthly concerts around the Morningson/Frankston region. These social events are open to the public including people living in nursing homes and hostels, and are held in various locations, enabling less mobile clients to participate. The concerts draw on the talents of local musicians and musical groups and there is a strong emphasis on audience participation. They are proving to be a relatively inexpensive way of providing opportunities for people to meet, to enjoy live music and to be involved in the life of the community.

*Based on information provided by Michael Hillier, Socialisation Coordinator,  
Brotherhood Community Care*

### **Active citizenship**

There is some evaluative and anecdotal evidence that arts interventions have a positive impact on civic engagement, ranging from increased engagement with formal political processes and institutions to local involvement in non-profit organisations and one-off civic events (see Matarasso 1997; Williams 1997; Long et al. 2002). These findings are consistent with generalised research on involvement in community organisations and community development programs. It is not clear, however, whether participation in arts projects has a positive impact on civic engagement because of their specific arts orientation

or because of their status as community-based development activities. One hint that participation in community arts has specific civic engagement effects is identified by Matarasso, whose broad comparative study of initiatives in the UK found that ‘62% of adults [who participated in the study] said that the opportunity to express their ideas through the arts was important to them’ (1997, p.7). Matarasso describes this effect as one of ‘giving voice’ to people as part of a process of ‘cultural democracy’.

### **Arts initiatives 6: Fostering active citizenship**

**The Torch Project** is an innovative approach to community cultural development, which utilises theatre and the performing arts to address difficult social issues, support community and individual development and ‘inspire people to grapple with issues of history, culture, identity and belonging’ (The Torch Project 2004). Since its inception in 1997, the Torch Project has evolved into a web of initiatives, ranging from organisational cultural development to community building in Victoria’s regions.

In 2002, The Torch Project initiated the Re-Igniting Community model, which uses the collaborative creation of theatre to enable marginalised communities and individuals to express themselves and tackle challenging local issues. In collaboration with local communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous regional organisations and local authorities, the Re-Igniting Community model has been implemented in Victoria’s South West, East Gippsland, and North and North West regions.

The Torch Project staff report that both the process of Re-Igniting Community and the performance it produces have multiple positive effects on the communities and individuals involved, including improved self-esteem, skills development and shared understandings of community needs and issues. The impacts of Re-Igniting Community in South West Victoria and East Gippsland have recently been evaluated by the University of Technology, Sydney.

Re-Igniting Community is widely recognised as a unique and effective community building model. It has been identified by Indigenous leaders as a successful model for engagement with Indigenous communities and has attracted the interest and support of government and community sector organisations alike. The work of the Torch Project in regional Victoria has led to the establishment of new cultural community development organisations and to greater attention to community cultural development by existing community sector organisations.

*Based on information provided by Steve Payne, Manager, The Torch*

## **Strengths of arts-based approaches to social inclusion**

Overall, arts initiatives appear to play a significant role in delivering, or mediating, social inclusion outcomes. Arts initiatives may have a strong positive impact on educational participation, personal development, job readiness, social cohesion and active citizenship. Further, there is some evidence that the arts contribute to improved health, reduced crime and increased employment rates, and enhanced educational performance.

While these pointers are significant, they do not tell us whether, and if so how, arts-based initiatives make specific contributions because of their arts focus, rather than simply as examples of effective community development. It seems, however, that arts initiatives are valuable social inclusion ‘tools’ in two specific ways:

*Arts projects facilitate engagement*

The broad consensus in the literature is that arts projects facilitate engagement because they are widely enjoyed by participants. Matarasso (1997) and Williams (1997) have pointed out that some arts initiatives involve challenges and risks for participants. Nevertheless, the literature consistently suggests high levels of interest in, enjoyment and retention in a range of arts activities in diverse settings. Involvement in arts projects often stimulates participants’ creative interests and thus facilitates high levels of active engagement.

*Arts initiatives can build bridging social capital*

As discussed earlier, social capital theory suggests that social inclusion is, in part, determined by the diversity of networks available to individuals, groups and communities. At the same time, conflict between individuals and groups is often a key obstruction to building social inclusion. Arts-based initiatives seem to be particularly effective in building networks amongst diverse groups and providing the social frameworks in which significant conflict can be resolved. This effect has been variously described as: providing alternative literacies through which conflict is expressed and resolved; acting as community education vehicles through which social problems are ‘named’ and explored; providing forums in which shared cultural meanings are developed; and providing effective social spaces in which diverse peoples come together.

## **Principles of good practice in arts and social inclusion**

Establishing universal principles of good practice in the use of the arts to facilitate social inclusion is difficult. Both the literature and the information provided by project staff suggest that the effectiveness of programs depends largely on the specific context, the participants and the particular objectives of the activity. However, several themes emerge:

- *Valuing the quality of artistic input*

Matarasso (1997), Williams (1997), Goodlad et al. (2002) and almost all of the BSL and partner organisation initiatives emphasise the importance of involving established artists in engaging and motivating participants.

- *Facilitating successful risk taking*

Matarasso (1997), Williams (1997) and Kay (2000) stress the need to support participants to establish, and meet, artistic and social challenges.

- *Fostering collaboration and group ownership*

There is a strong emphasis on involving participants in setting the objectives and scope of specific initiatives.

- *Evaluating outcomes, as well as outputs*

Long et al. (2002) and Coalter (2001) particularly note the importance of evaluating outcomes in terms of participants’ improved opportunities for social inclusion. This will be discussed further below.

## **Limitations in understanding the social inclusion outcomes of the arts**

Social exclusion is currently a key concern of, and conundrum for, many community organisations, individual practitioners and policy makers alike. It is not surprising, then, that there are several common themes running through the literature on arts and social inclusion which identify specific problems in understanding the relationship between them.

One widely discussed problem is *evaluation* (see Shaw 2003; Jermyn 2001; Coalter 2001; Reeves 2002; Long et al. 2002 amongst others). Some of the key barriers to effective evaluation are:

- resistance to evaluation from the community arts sector, based on a concern that this will lead to a very instrumental valuing of the arts
- the absence of effective methods of evaluating the social inclusion outcomes, as distinct from outputs, of the arts
- different evaluation needs of community arts programs, compared with their funders.

In the BSL and related initiatives canvassed in this report, evaluation ranged from formal evaluation to staff recollections of anecdotal feedback from participants. Writers and project staff consistently report that effective evaluation requires resources and evaluation methods appropriate to the context. Principles for effective evaluation will be considered below.

Another problem in assessing the relationship between the arts and social inclusion is a relative *lack of rigorous longitudinal research* on the social inclusion impacts of arts interventions (White 2003; Hamilton et al. 2003). It is difficult to identify the true social inclusion impacts of arts initiatives without measuring the effects of those initiatives on people over time. In the context of community sector organisations, the longitudinal work of Thiele and Marsden in evaluating the impacts of arts programs within the Jesuit Social Services broader suite of youth services is a notable and positive exception.

This literature review has also illuminated a conceptual limitation in understanding the social inclusion effects of the arts. Virtually all the literature relating to this topic is ‘arts led’, rather than ‘social inclusion led’—that is, the literature takes the community arts projects and programs as its analytical starting point. One result is that little attention is paid to diverse arts-based development activities that are integrated into the programs of (formal and informal) organisations that are not principally focused on the arts. In Philadelphia, Stern and Seifert (2002) identified non-arts organisations, such as community service non-profit organisations, as important actors that are often overlooked in assessing the potential of community cultural development in building community capacity. Similarly, Goodlad et al.’s (2002) review of arts initiatives in Scottish Social Inclusion Partnerships observed that secondary providers do much work which is often not evaluated in terms of the impact of the arts on social inclusion.

The relative absence of evaluative and research literature on more integrated approaches is of significance to organisations like the BSL where the arts are used as one intervention amongst many to achieve social inclusion outcomes. The Scottish evaluative research undertaken by Goodlad et al. concluded that:



Social inclusion might be supported by participation in the arts, but it is unlikely to be the only factor in securing inclusion in more than a very few distinctive cases (2002a, p.14)

Other writers also note a lack of information about the effectiveness of arts initiatives in achieving social inclusion where they are integrated into broader (community and personal development) programs, and/or conducted in partnership between specialist arts organisations and groups focusing on social inclusion. This gap suggests the important role of organisations such as the BSL in modelling and evaluating integrated approaches.

## Effective evaluation

The literature review highlights the importance of effective evaluation if we are to understand the social inclusion impacts of the arts. While there are no universally effective approaches to evaluation, methods need to take into account the context, objectives and resource base of the initiatives. The following issues should be considered in the design of effective evaluations:

- *Evaluation should be incorporated into program/activity design.* The design should include clear program/initiative objectives against which to evaluate outcomes and allow for collection of baseline data for the purposes of comparison at the point of evaluation.
- *Methods of evaluation should be meaningful to the staff and practical within the resources available.* The diversity of activities, contexts and participants of arts initiatives to enhance social inclusion suggests the need for ‘realistic evaluation’ approaches (see Pawson & Tilley 1997) that respond to the specifics of each initiative and use multiple methods. Further, where evaluation is integrated into program activity and design, it is important that evaluation methods can be employed by the practitioners involved.
- *Methods of evaluation should evaluate outcomes, not just outputs.* Discussions with BSL and partner organisation staff reinforce observations in the literature: it is important to evaluate the actual impacts of programs on the lives of participants (whether as individuals or communities). As Long et al. conclude, the outputs—such as the number of events staged, audience participation levels—may tell us something about the activity, but it is essential to evaluate the program’s ‘success in securing outcomes that at the very least advance the position of those who are socially excluded’ (2002, p. 3).

Some practitioners and researchers also point to the importance of evaluation methods that, themselves, model and value creativity (see for example, Thiele & Marsden 2003).

## Conclusions

There is significant evidence that arts initiatives and activities play a role in achieving social inclusion outcomes for disadvantaged individuals, groups and communities. The preliminary review of activities utilising the arts within BSL and its partner organisations suggests that the arts are being employed in diverse ways to empower individuals, heal communities, foster social connections, create employment and encourage educational participation. The specific benefits of arts initiatives appear to be that they are

overwhelmingly viewed positively by participants and they provide important interactive contexts in which difficult social issues can be addressed.

This review has highlighted the importance of developing methods of evaluation that effectively capture the impacts of the arts on social inclusion. In particular, there is a need for evaluation focusing on integrated approaches to the use of the arts within broader social inclusion initiatives. The BSL and other community service organisations that specialise in responding to social exclusion have a potentially significant role to play in developing better understandings and practices in this area.

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