

CREATING A CULTURE OF INCLUSION

THE ARTS RIPPLE EFFECT
VALUING THE ARTS IN COMMUNITIES



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There is a common understanding that social policy must foster a culture that is inclusive if it is to deliver long-term benefits to a community. The arts do not offer a panacea for the complex issues that cause social exclusion, but it has been shown that they can be a significant part of the solution because they transcend barriers of language, culture, ability, and socio-economic status.²⁸

An arts-based approach to community engagement creates an environment that ensures a diversity of voices is heard. This is especially important for people who experience difficulty expressing their thoughts and feelings verbally, or whose circumstances may hinder their ability to communicate easily with others.

Arts initiatives are now increasingly being used as a way to facilitate social inclusion of refugee and recent migrant communities and facilitate reconnection with Indigenous cultural practice.

Social inclusion indicators are highly tangible outcomes such as increased employment rates and improved educational performance.²⁹

Place-based initiatives aiming to address disadvantage (e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal) also commonly adopt arts-based practices because they engender a culture of inclusion that shifts the emphasis from physical regeneration to the people who live in the community.³⁰

²⁸ Jermyn H. (2001). *Arts and Social Exclusion: a Review Prepared for the Arts Council of England*. UK: Arts Council England.

²⁹ Garner G. (2009). 'Belonging and Acknowledgement: Discussing Community-based Arts projects With Shahin Shafaei.' *Migration Action* No. 1, May 2009. Melbourne: RMIT University, p 30–31.

³⁰ Mulligan M & Smith P. (2009). 'Art, Governance and the Turn into Community: Putting Art at the Heart of Local Government.' *ReGenerating Community Conference Papers*. Melbourne: Globalism Research Centre, RMIT University. Available at <http://mams.rmit.edu.au/fc1d0uu0zhpm1.pdf>

CREATING CONNECTIONS: STATEWIDE INDIGENOUS ARTS OFFICER IN PRISONS AND COMMUNITY PROGRAM

The Torch Project facilitates diverse, vibrant arts and community projects throughout Victoria, bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together in collaborative arts events and workshops to address critical social issues. In 2011, The Torch Project completed an ambitious 18-month pilot program to address the over representation of Aboriginal people in our prison system which is currently 14 times higher than it is for non-Indigenous Australians.

The **Statewide Indigenous Arts Officer in Prisons and Community program** focused on generating opportunities for Aboriginal people as emerging artists while strengthening cultural ties to family, country, and the broader community. The Confined exhibition has become one of The Torch Project's annual highlights and in 2013 featured 65 artists, including a number of artists no longer in prison, who are keen to develop their artistic careers.

"Having people care about the fellas and take an interest in what they were doing...well...it's given me hope to turn my life around, which I wasn't expecting." (Program Participant)³¹

The program evaluation demonstrated the potential of the initiative to deliver measurable social change with recidivism rates reduced by 50% based on previously available data.³² A key to achieving this has been the confidence developed by the participants through connections built with the arts industry. The Torch Project worked on giving inmates access to the knowledge and tools to engage in vocational arts activities upon their release from prison, connecting them to community arts networks and professional arts industry contacts to support their transition back to community life.

<http://thetorch.org.au/programsSIA.html>



Opening night, *Confined 5* Exhibition, St Kilda Town Hall (2013) Photographer/Source: Unknown

³¹ Hallwright M. (2012). *The Torch – Evaluation of Statewide Indigenous Arts Officer in Prisons & Community Program* [online], p. 20. Available at <http://thetorch.org.au/torchwebimages/IAOPEVALUATION2012.pdf>

³² Ibid, p 7.

CASE STUDY: ARTS PROJECT AUSTRALIA

Founded in 1974, **Arts Project Australia** was originally formed to promote and exhibit the work of artists with an intellectual disability as belonging to the broad spectrum of contemporary art, and to represent studio artists in mainstream art exhibitions and events.

An early pilot program was offered for three hours per week with interest in and demand for the program continuing to grow until, in 1990, it began operating full-time in rented premises. In 2003, it relocated to its own purpose-built building in the Melbourne suburb of Northcote.

The Arts Project studio is the first of its kind to be established in Australia and one of the earliest in the world. Since its inception, the Arts Project studio and gallery have supported and promoted its artists in creating original artworks and bringing them to increasingly wider audiences. **Arts Project Australia** support its artists, promotes their work and advocates for inclusion within contemporary art practice. **Arts Project Australia** has increasingly encouraged external artists to collaborate with its artists, most recently through the 'Knowing Me, Knowing You' project.

The project aimed to make wide and lasting connections between studio participants and contemporary artists and more broadly, to break down the barriers between artists with a disability and the contemporary art world. 10 pairs of artists worked together over ten months in various locations and media, which culminated in an exhibition in early 2014. The outcomes included the creation of ongoing mentorships and relationships beyond the life of the project, an increased awareness of the collaborative process and the development of a shared visual language that finds its voice somewhere between intellect and intuition.

The process and outcomes are documented in a blog³³ and cinematographer Shelly Farthing-Dawe is documenting the evolution of the project as a film journal that will later be edited into a documentary film.

³³ <http://www.artspjroject.org.au/blog/knowing-me-knowing-you>

Being able to exhibit work and collaborate with external artists connects the **Arts Project Australia** artists with a broader community with whom they may otherwise have limited contact, thereby increasing their sense of inclusion. **Arts Project Australia** plays a role in decreasing this community's sense of social isolation by providing opportunities for connecting with their friends, family and other artists and organisations. Research has also found that the impact of the work of **Arts Project Australia** is profound for the families and friends of artists as it provides them with a means of connection with a loved one.³⁴

Three of **Arts Project Australia's** artists exhibited their work at the National Gallery of Victoria's (NGV) major contemporary art exhibition *Melbourne Now* in 2013/14. *Melbourne Now* experienced record attendances for the NGV, thus bringing their work to a significant audience and raising the artists' profile.

Arts Project Australia Fiona Taylor working on her collaborative linocut for 'Knowing Me, Knowing You' at Angela Cavalieri's studio (2013)
Photo: Penelope Hunt



³⁴ Evans J, Bridson K & Minkiewicz. (2013). *Branding the Arts: Demonstrating Impact – Four Case Studies of Public Art Museums*. Melbourne: Asia Pacific Social Impact Leadership Centre, Melbourne Business School, p 131.

"[The arts] transcend barriers of language, culture, ability, and socio-economic status"

Jermyn H. (2001). *Arts and Social Exclusion: a Review Prepared for the Arts Council of England*. UK: Arts Council England.