



Community development programs – the other side of Burrinja

Most of our members and visitors know the vast array of public programs on offer at Burrinja. A quick scroll down our lengthy Events Page provides a host of activities and events. But there are many more community cultural development programs (CCD) running behind the scenes at Burrinja that we don't generally publicise.

Burrinja really does live by its vision; *Building Community through Arts*. We endeavour to bring arts, culture and community together in participatory programs that work toward building stronger, more resilient communities. Such programs contribute toward building social capital through active engagement and by breaking down isolation and disadvantage – including social, economic and geographic. This positive social impact of the arts has been comprehensively demonstrated in studies throughout Australia, the UK and North America. An investment in cultural development promotes personal development and links communities. In turn, there are positive effects for well-being and mental health - improving quality of life at many levels.

To achieve these outcomes, Burrinja seeks to identify those members of the community who do not traditionally participate in organised cultural activities, developing strategies and programs to engage them. This is often best achieved through establishing partnerships across a wide range of community organisations; from local Indigenous groups to health care providers, from youth theatre groups and schools to community houses. Key partners Burrinja currently works with include Ranges Community Health Services, Dandenong Ranges Music Council, Youth Services, Anchorcare, Anglicare, Department of Human Services, Open Channel and Belgrave Community Arts Partnership.

In order to get the greatest benefit from our CCD programs we have moved away from the 'big glitzy program with lots of people' model to a more targeted approach. In this way we avoid simply engaging those people who will always get involved in programs, reaching out instead on an individual level to those on the margins who would not normally participate in organized cultural activities. Using this model we've successfully brought into Burrinja's programs people who previously would not have seen the potential value of arts and culture, and in turn we've connected these people with community and skills.

Examples of such programs include stencil art, computer animation and digital imaging workshops, and an intensive ongoing new media program which is headed toward an exciting public outcome during Mental Health Week in October this year. 'Sing, Play, Create', an arts program with RCHS for those parenting in difficult circumstances and their children is now in its second year, and has even produced its own spin-off weekly creative group of former participants. Such programs are intensive and time consuming for our staff, and have only been made possible by the funding support of VicHealth.

At the other end of the age spectrum, Burrinja 'Arties' is a weekly art and social program for those living in supported residential care and the socially isolated at risk of being homeless. Participants have very little other social or creative interaction in their lives. This weekly program facilitated by a creative arts therapist fills a terrific need in the community for social interaction, building a sense of community by participating in group activities based around arts, music, culture and social interaction.

Burrinja also works through its partnerships to help facilitate other creative programs in the community, such as the Lantern Parade with Belgrave Community Arts Partnership, the Hills Film Group at the Cameo, Youth Music Connection with the DRMC and the upcoming Sustainability through the Arts exhibition with the Eucalypt Centre and Tecoma Primary School.

Meanwhile, the Burrinja Collection is utilized as a valuable indigenous education resource for the wider community, with numerous school groups both local and from afar taking advantage of the centre's education programs, combining tours with hands-on workshops with indigenous artists. (Burrinja is also on the board of Aboriginal Tourism Victoria). And the Dandenong Ranges Open Studios sees Burrinja taking a lead role in the promotion and professional development of artists throughout the hills in their own studios, while promoting cultural tourism and economic development within the region.

So for Burrinja, our public programs and events are only the tip of the iceberg. Below the surface there's even more activity that seeks to produce creative capacity building outcomes for our community. If you'd like further information on any of these programs or partnerships, please contact us.