



Wednesday, 5 October 2011, 1:30 pm.

## **Roundtable 12: Sante! Arts and Wellbeing**

### Speakers

**Pamela Udoka**, President/Artistic, Director, Children's Arts Development Initiative, Nigeria

**Raelene Baker**, Principal Indigenous Advisor, Arts Queensland, Australia

**Tim Greacen**, Director, Maison Blanche Research Laboratory, France (only commenting)

### Moderator

**Ruth Rentschler**, Boardmember, VicHealth, Australia

### Rapporteur

**Carin Mistry**, Director, Dance, Australia Council for the Arts

## **Description of the session**

This session focused on art and health from different perspectives – policy makers, health sector, youth areas, regions and building communities through the arts.

**Ruth Rentschler** explained how VicHealth works, and then explained the focus on arts and cultural sector and participation to increase health of the community. She noted the factors including cultural participation that influence health in society, community, family/household and individuals, and how isolation has impacts on health. Ruth then described the tools and resources used by Vic Health including building health through arts and new media (e.g. Blaktraks – Koorie heritage trust), the of social media and other frameworks, development of a partnerships analysis tool and developing a standards document to enhance the environment in arts organisations to make them more welcoming.

**Raelene Baker** focused in her presentation on Far North Queensland and explained that the situation for Indigenous health outcomes is still very poor. As an important detail, Raelene acknowledged those involved in projects who have given permissions for the stories being told in the session. She displayed several examples and stories from communities and explained several facts including a map of tribal clan lands, specific government actions (e.g. Native Titles Lands Act) and statistics on Indigenous populations. She said that Indigenous communities are dealing with several social problems such as high rates of incarceration and deaths in custody, high suicide rates, racism and living in small towns with

poor services and physical boundaries making Indigenous people sometimes refugees in their own country. As regards art, she stated that it cannot be separated from life and health and talked about the impact of different art pieces such as the film *Once Were Warriors*, *Ghost Nets* and weaving of baskets, the work of Mavis and the impact of the song by Archie Roach 'Took the Children Away'. As conclusion Raelene talked about projects in Lockhart River and Aurukun working with other Government agencies, Mornington Island and Doomadgee as well as Artist in Residence programs in the communities and the pivotal role of Arts Centres.

**Pamela Udoka** talked about Children's Arts Development Initiative – CHAIN – that is as strong as its weakest link and where all children support each other. The objective is to enrich and empower children aiming to build confidence and grow imagination. Pamela has been in Children's Theatre practice since 1991 but CHAIN was formally registered in 2007. CHAIN uses 'Village Square' technique in its work and focuses on storytelling and play production. Pamela told an example of how CHAIN uses its play production methods in helping children overcome ADHD and other psychological conditions through the framework of theatre. In examples like this, the issues are addressed indirectly and covertly and the idea is not to openly discuss improving mental health through the arts. She also gave some background on mental health services and structures in Nigeria. In some communities in Nigeria it is not acceptable to put sick members of the community away in institutions. They are still regarded as part of the larger society not treated as outcasts. There is now a 'village' hospital in existence in Abeokuta in the Western region of Nigeria, so people in the community do not know who is well or unwell. Pamela also underlined that very few people are qualified to work in the area of psychodrama and outlined the potential for this in a country where there is respect for theatre.

**Tim Graecen** stressed the message made in the morning's session stating that in old countries like France the weight of institutions slows things down and therefore France has a lot of philosophers but fewer doers. Tim stated that culture is there for building wellbeing and that there are many definitions of this. He also said that experimentation keeps culture alive and up to date as wellbeing was only discovered 15 years ago.

## **Creative intersections discussed in the session**

Many of the examples given by the speakers were examples of creative intersection between health and the arts.

## **Examples of good examples and practices**

- Steve Mayhew outlined project of group of artists who descend on a town and works with a community on an installation project. Level of tension and support mechanisms when working with young people has changed. Does not work to create audiences – they are the people who decide to engage with a project.
- Jamie Bladel has done a lot of work in the area of mental illness – but only if invited into a community. Most often people with a mental illness want more people to understand their situation – therefore an audience is really important to them. Takes place in a house, a football club and an empty space.
- Importance of working from the ground up – not imposing on communities. Being invited in. The village square approach was cited by Pamela from Nigeria – getting the support from the whole

community. Jamie Bladel will only work with communities when she is invited. Strong examples of arts health projects in FNQ given by Raelene – in Lockhart River, Aurukun, Mornington Island and Doomagee with good outcomes in relation to health and earning income.

- Training being given on the ground – in situ – example given by Raelene of training being offered by Aboriginal Arts Centres in regional communities – see example above.
- The importance of storytelling and how one story or one song can have so much impact – e.g. Archie Roach's They Took the Children. Story telling is central in cultures where oral traditions are strong.
- Vic Health Standards Document to enhance arts environments to make them more welcoming and Partnerships Analysis Tool – strong focus on the use of new media in arts/health projects.
- Deadly Thinking Kits from Arts Queensland
- CHAIN – Nigeria exists without government funding.
- Arts and Health Foundation (Australia) wants stories to be uploaded on their websites.

## Identified problems

- Funding for projects not coming from health budgets – always has to come externally e.g. from philanthropy or arts sources. Not prioritised as core activities.

## Recommendations for future actions

- Opportunities for more international creative connections – e.g. Australia and the Pacific.
- Where aid agencies invest in cultural projects they should connect up with arts agencies to look for opportunities for artist exchange.

## Other additional comments

- The importance of tailoring work for communities (Penny Hutchinson):
  - Funding often has to be from philanthropists or non health
  - Not centralised into the health sector
  - Need to bring into the mix how the institutions do not enable connections.
- Build links across portfolios
- Research needed to provide evidence of positive impact. There are research projects. Armidale – dance and tango.
- Not a common dialogue across sectors.
- Arts of the homeless seen in the streets of Melbourne – could they not make money from their art.
- Arts and Health Foundation want to upload information of projects on their website