Stories tell culture, connecting identity with place: Australian cultural policy and collective creativity

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ABSTRACT

The convergence of art and culture within Australian cultural policy disguises conflicting and preferred meanings ascribed to key terms such as ‘culture’ and ‘community’. Arguments for funding the arts tend to support programs that express a universalising script of a commonly shared Australian national identity. This study has recorded and analysed interviews with six arts/cultural policy managers and eleven creative practitioners to assess the impact of Australian cultural policy. The study concludes that Australian cultural policy discourse is prone to ambiguous and preferred meanings that legitimate public funding for art and cultural programs.

The thesis argues that current cultural policy aims to grow the economy with a creative industries strategy while the community cultural development model is designed to build social capital. The two approaches are not always consistent in their aims and outcomes.

The Australia Council’s community arts programs are founded on cultural democratic ideals, advocating ordinary people’s right to engage in creative expressions of Australian identity. A founding principle for funding the community arts is intended to promote cultural pluralism. However this approach has contributed to the prevailing view that the sector privileges the cultural fringes at the expense of the wider Australian community.

The thesis tracks how funding for the community arts has devolved to local government to voluntarily plan and manage community cultural development even as state and
federal governments continue to assert influence in local and regional arts and cultural programming. There is also the expectation that local government must demonstrate expanded understanding of culture as an integration of social ideals and economic objectives.

The research method deployed by the thesis encourages participants to tell their stories. Consequently, storytelling emerges as a critical creative method and practice that can disrupt and renew idealised images of Australian cultural identity.

The thesis concludes that there is a general consensus based on the interview data that culture does not need to be mandated by government. As local government continues to rely on key individuals to identify and realise local arts and cultural aspirations, these tend to support idealised expressions of a shared cultural heritage. The consequences are a general resistance to difference in art and cultural practices.
Acknowledgements

The research was made possible with the generous cooperation of each of the contributing participants. I thank Diana Blom, Anna Gibbs and Anne Power who supervised various aspects of the study. Hart Cohen made the completion of the study possible, and words cannot express my gratitude. Also to Lauris Elms and Jean Callaghan who have taken the journey with me from teacher to friend. The work is dedicated to my partner Jonathon for his inexhaustible patience and support.
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is original and I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

SIGNED _______________________________________

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Glossary

**CCD:** Sonn, Drew & Kasat (2002) outline how the field of community cultural development can be predicted and measured by indicators such as building capacity, growing social capital and developing a sense of community (SOC). For example the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation conducted research into the impact of community arts participation between 1999 and 2002. Ten case studies were investigated and data collected from observations made of focus groups, public performances, discussions with audience members, and interviews with participants and creative staff. Three key mental health determinants were identified as social connectedness, valuing diversity and economic participation. VicHealth consequently developed policy aimed at harnessing the potential of the collaborative arts that targets social, economic and physical environments with the strategic view of improving health and wellbeing (VicHealth 2002:25).

**Community Art:** also termed amateur, participatory, collaborative or welfare art. The Australia Council’s Community Arts Program was founded in 1975 in an attempt to bridge the divide between amateur and professional arts practice (Hawkins 1993: xix). The Australia Council Community Arts Program evolved into the Community Cultural Development Committee (CCD) in 1987 in the wake of radical welfare rhetoric that continued to underpin community arts policy (Hawkins 1993:78).

**Community Artists:** also known as cultural workers, artworkers and/or CCD practitioners. Community cultural development is described as a methodology that
builds personal and social capacity through creative cultural participation (Sonn, Drew & Kasat 2002). Community cultural workers are also identified in how they enable community creativity designed to enhance personal and collective health and wellbeing (Pitts 2004:7).

Cultural Industries: The cultural industries are defined as the modes of production and organisation of industrial corporations to produce and disseminate symbols in the form of cultural goods and services, as commodities (Garnham 1987:25). The cultural industries incorporate infrastructure such as galleries, libraries and museums.

Creative Industries: The Creative Industries is a term coined in the UK in 1997 to denote exploitation of intellectual property, in response to global technological shifts. Individual creative potential as a key economic driver, emerged out of the digital revolution (Henkel & Randall 2005:2) and the consequent knowledge economy is founded on a highly educated creative class, seen as valuable human capital (Florida 2002).

Cultural Policy: Cultural policy in Australia has generally been viewed as arts policy (Throsby 2006). The terms ‘art’ and ‘culture’ tend to be applied as synonymous and interchangeable (Mills 2006:2). The Keating Government’s Creative Nation (1994)\(^1\) attempted to articulate a national cultural policy. However, presently local government is responsible for cultural planning, which is a voluntary commitment widely regarded as


**DCITA**: Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

**DOTARS**: Department of Transport and Regional Services

**RADO**: Regional Arts Development Officer. Regional Arts NSW under the umbrella of Regional Arts Australia is the peak body for arts and community cultural development in regional, rural and remote New South Wales. Regional Arts NSW is a non-profit, incorporated association headed by a Board of Directors comprised of members from each of the Regional Arts Boards (RAB) and additional co-opted members.\(^3\) Each Regional Arts Board employs a Regional Arts Development Officer (RADO) and generally other staff who manage the delivery of cultural development programs in their region.\(^4\) (See Figures 1 – 5 for further explanation of Australian federal, state, regional and local arts and culture organisational structure).


Chapter Outlines

The Introduction illustrates how Australian cultural policy is prone to shifting and contradictory rhetoric that advocates funding art and culture. It is evident that these disguised meanings in policy tend to support funding idealised expressions of a unified national cultural identity. The study applies a gestalt method, supported by narrative theory. Narrative theory is examined where story encoded as knowledge, transmits meaning cross-culturally and over generations. The gestalt method applies this narrative theory that describes feeling as a catalyst for critical thinking.

Chapter 2 explains the study’s narrative approach where interviews aimed to encourage participants to tell their stories. The applied four-stage gestalt method is described in how participant interviews are interpreted and analysed. The chapter profiles interviewed participants, with summaries of topics and themes inducted from the first three phases of the gestalt method. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 complete the four-stage gestalt method, where inducted topics and themes detailed in Chapter 2 are integrated and synthesised in composing a thesis argument.

Chapter 6 draws the thesis argument’s main themes together. Shifting and contradictory rhetoric has contributed to ambiguity in how Australian cultural policy applies the terms ‘culture’ and ‘community.’ Added to this ambiguity is a prevailing view that culture does not need to be mandated due to local government voluntarily managing community cultural development. It is

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5 Dissanayake (2000) describes biological attunement between mother and child that explains cultural aesthetic expression.

6 Bennett’s (2005) affect theory examines how deep thought is triggered by sensation embedded in the visual arts.
evident however, that local Councils tend to rely on key individuals to deliver local arts and cultural projects. The study finds that as a result, local and regional cultural programming tends toward supporting creative expressions of a unified Australian cultural identity. Creative practitioners describe storytelling as a critical creative practice that disrupts and renews idealised images of Australian national identity.
CHAPTER 1    INTRODUCTION

Prior to returning to university in 2000, I had been working professionally in the community sector, albeit with an increasing sense of unease of my place in implementing social policies devoid of creative design. Undertaking a music degree allowed me the opportunity to reflect as well as develop musical practice, with technical proficiency to instigate and direct community choirs. I was able to observe this field of collective creative endeavour from a critical vantage point, particularly with research I undertook investigating the community choir (Slottje 2004). The study found that participatory singing promotes psycho-social as well as educational benefits. However, during the investigation it became clear that there is a gap in knowledge in understanding the impact of the participatory arts.\(^7\) The focus of this research therefore became an exploration of a field of method and practice that has yet to be critically examined and clarified.

In the early stages of the current investigation, a central question emerged regarding the influence of government cultural policy on funding the community arts.\(^8\) Throughout the research it became increasingly clear that the uninitiated outsider is easily mired by ambiguity and multilayered meanings in cultural policy discourse. Therefore in my interviews with eleven creative practitioners and six arts and cultural policy managers, I aimed to clarify community arts

\(^7\) For example Clift et al., (2010) state that research conducted on the impact of participatory singing to date indicates an academic field in the early stages of development.

\(^8\) ‘The’ definite article denotes a specific field of practice rather than a generic appellation. ‘…a history of the emergence of the community arts as an administrative and funding category within the Australia Council…’ (Hawkins G. 1993: ix).
method and practice and the impact of government cultural policy on the sector.

The study applies a narrative method in the context of related literature and theoretical paradigms. The work points to how cultural policy rhetoric applies the terms ‘art’ and ‘culture’ as interchangeable and synonymous, referring simultaneously to disparate aesthetic values, social ideals and economic drivers. The study also indicates persisting ambiguity over what is meant by the term ‘the community.’ It is found that these contested terms are applied in shifting and conflicting arguments that advocate funding arts and cultural projects. It becomes evident that expressions of an idealised shared national identity is prevalent, proving resistant to difference and innovation.

1.1 Funding the Arts

In Australia there has been a tradition of self-appointed cultural leaders who influence government spending on the arts, motivated by the belief that their patronage is in the national best interest. Their reasons for funding ‘the arts’ have ranged from inspiring the community with artistic excellence; elevation of standards; education; encouraging tourism; decentralisation and therapy for the mentally disturbed⁹ (Rowse 1985:10-11).

In 1943 Australian professional singer Dorothy Helmrich founded the Council for the Advancement in Education and Music (CEMA), because she believed art to be a human necessity rather than an élite privilege (Carell & Dean 1982). Helmrich adapted the CEMA model from the Arts Council of Britain, with the difference that the Australian organisation was formed entirely

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⁹ The term ‘mentally disturbed’ is an example of a historically accepted label applied in rationale for funding the arts. As Williams (1976) demonstrates, values and meanings can be revealed when these unchallenged terms are questioned.
in regional centres. As no funding was provided in the initial stages, volunteers attracted to the organisation included the NSW Division of the Country Women’s Association where branches managed theatrical, arts and crafts tours to regional Australia. The CEMA was renamed the Arts Council of Australia in 1947, structured as a series of State Divisions providing the foundation for the current organisation of Regional Arts Australia.

**Figure 1 Regional Arts Australia**
Each of the regional state arts organisations is distinctly structured. For example Regional Arts NSW as the peak body for arts and community cultural development in regional, rural and remote New South Wales, is subdivided into thirteen geographic local government areas (LGA’s). Regional Arts Development Offices represent groups of councils that have agreed to work together to establish a Regional Arts Board that with Arts NSW co-funds the employment of a Regional Arts Development Officer (RADO).

**Figure 2 Regional Arts NSW Map**

The strategic direction of each Regional Arts Development Office is guided by a Regional Arts Board (RAB), comprised of representatives from local government, local arts organisations, galleries, arts councils, tourism, community organisations, individual artists and community members.

**Figure 3  NSW Regional Arts Boards**
While the Arts Council of Australia was in still formation, Helmrich was appointed to the Adult Education Advisory Committee, and it was through this Board that the first government grants were allocated to the Arts Council. However the scramble for government funding caused rivalry and division between the Arts Council of Australia and the Australian Elizabethan Trust Opera Company. The Australian Opera began as a Trust venture in 1956 which became known as the Elizabethan Theatre Trust Opera Company in the following year. The Australia Council for the Arts (ACFTA) was established in 1968, converted to the Australia Council in 1973 and given its Act of Parliament in 1975.

The Australia Council is the federal principal arts funding body, comprised of artform boards that provide advice and development of arts policy and grant programs within the framework determined by the Council.
Figure 4 Australia Council Organisational Structure

Australia Council
Minister for the Arts
Office of the Arts
Council Chair
Deputy Chair
Chief Executive Officer (ex officio)
ATSIA Board Chair
Arts Funding Board Chairs
Community Interest Representative
Major Performing Arts Board Chair

Artsupport Australia
Communications
Corporate Resources

Arts Funding Boards
Dance, Literature, Music, Theatre, Visual Arts
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts (ATSIA)
Major Performing Arts Board

Community Partnerships Committee
Community Arts and Cultural Development

Inter-Arts Office
Interdisciplinary Arts Practice

Arts Development
Market Development, Audience Development,
Research & Analysis, Business Capacity Building

28 Retrieved 24 June 2011 from
State Arts

Each State and Territory arts organisation is independently structured:

Arts Victoria is a division of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, which formulates arts policy and develops arts and cultural industries across the State.\(^{11}\)

Arts NSW is a division of the NSW Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation that advises the Minister for the Arts on all aspects of the arts and cultural activity.\(^{12}\) Program Manager of Arts NSW responsible for Museums and Capital Infrastructure, City of the Arts and Community Cultural Development was interviewed for this study (see 2.3.3 Michael: Arts NSW Cultural Development Program Manager)

Arts Queensland, a sector of the Department of Education and the Arts, develops and implements cultural policy and administers cultural funding and capital works programs that support arts and cultural development for the benefit of the community.\(^{13}\)

Arts WA is a division of the Department of Culture and the Arts responsible for the development and support of the arts sector in Western Australia. The department portfolio includes the State Library of Western Australia, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Western Australian Museum, ScreenWest and State Records Office.\(^{14}\)


**Arts NT**: The Northern Territory Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts is responsible for developing Northern Territory arts, culture and heritage conservation. Arts NT determines policy, operational and financial support and advice to the arts sector and to the Northern Territory government. Arts programs and services aim to support key arts organisations; regional and remote festival development; provision and support for physical infrastructure for arts and cultural activity; regional arts development initiatives; industry and audience development support.\(^{15}\)

**Arts Tasmania** is part of the Tasmanian Department of Tourism, Arts and the Environment, responsible for implementing Government arts policies and programs. Arts Tasmania administers funding to the arts and museums sector; operates the Art for Public Buildings Scheme; liaises with Commonwealth and State agencies on arts matters, and provides advice on Government assistance to the arts sector.\(^{16}\)


Figure 5  State Arts Organisational Structure
1.2 Merging Art and Culture

The community arts as a bureaucratic construction (Hawkins 1993) has always been a highly contested sector with no definitive description of the practice, and comprised of radical elements (see 4.1 Artistic Virtuosity and the Cultural Fringes; 4.6 Local Vernacular Cultures; 5.1 Cultural Activism; 5.1.2 Women Storytellers). The Whitlam government created the Community Arts and Development Committee as part of the conversion of the Australian Council for the Arts into the Australia Council. This Labour party policy was founded on cultural pluralist ideals, intended to bridge the divide between the amateur and professional arts. Funding the community arts was legitimised by ideals advocating ordinary people’s access and participation in cultural engagement, as well as supporting creative expressions of Australian national identity (Hawkins 1993).

Donald Horne Chair of the Australia Council for the Arts between 1985-1991, was committed to cultural diversity ideals, and advocated principles of cultural democracy. Horne linked the arts to a wider community cultural development agenda, as he believed in expanding the arts from élitist connotations to wider social engagement:

...if more people did their own 'art' that could be the beginning of the end of the narrow concept of 'economic man'... an ideal, not in opposition to 'high art'... but, in a way, as part of it (Horne 2000: 265).

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17 The category ‘community arts’ had no real currency in Australia until it appeared in federal arts policy as a separate funding program in 1973. The creation of the Community Arts and Development Committee formed part of the Whitlam government’s conversion of the Australian Council for the Arts into the Australia Council. (Hawkins 1990)
The conversion of the Australia Council’s Community Arts Program to the Community Cultural Development Committee in July 1987 followed continuing emphasis on advocating social ideals of cultural diversity. However arguments for funding the Community Arts Program were consistently resisted, as the sector was viewed as marginal\textsuperscript{18} and unprofessional (Horne 2000: 271). For example the Hawke government’s federal Minister for the Arts, Barry Cohen, attempted to divest funding from the program because he believed the sector was too political\textsuperscript{19} (see 3.1 Marginal Arts; 4.1 Artistic Virtuosity and the Cultural Fringes).

In response to this opposition and internal resistance to funding the community arts, Horne organised a paper with Director of the Australia Council’s Community Cultural Development Unit, Jon Hawkes, with the aim of moving beyond the ‘grants culture’ and towards strategic alliances with local government (Horne 2000: 272). Horne advocated broader engagement of the ordinary citizenry in cultural life. He writes in his memoir of raising with then federal Treasurer, Paul Keating, the idea of cultural investment rather than continuing a dependency on grants that protected art produced from the margins. Horne asserts that his ideas were dismissed by Keating (Horne 2000: 81-83) who went on to propose Creative Nation (1994). The document remains the

\textsuperscript{18} Marginality is described as identifying as non-Anglo (Gunew 2008), which is also discussed in Castles et al. (1990), and Smith & Brett (2001).

\textsuperscript{19} The study explores how Australian cultural policy has historically disguised ideological values, as distinct from popular culture targeted for mass entertainment. Hawkins (1993) drawing on Foucault’s discourse analysis theory, illustrates how the community arts sector is a bureaucratic invention. Here the central idea is of power relations embedded in institutional discourse: ‘Discourse Analysis concentrates on the conditions which produce knowledge and practices...method of tracing how certain ideas and practices have come to signify community arts...meanings shift and are reiterated over time...’ (p xxi). This premise is also supported by Williams (1976) who provides a comprehensive analysis of the transition of the meaning of words loaded with unchallenged values and ideology as applied by dominant groups.
only attempt to articulate a national Australian cultural policy\textsuperscript{19} that emphasised creativity as the essential element common to both cultural and economic development.

Expanding cultural references to broader social ideals and economic imperatives followed shifts that occurred in UK economic policies (Hartley in Garnham 1987). These policies were revised by the incumbent Thatcher administration (Cunningham 2002:5). In Australia, Keating’s attempt to link creativity with economic development was dismissed as utopian by the incumbent Howard government. However the ground had been prepared for emphasis of creativity and industry in consequent arts and cultural policies with the amalgamation of information technologies, communication and the arts. The states were then able to easily identify clusters of creative growth (Throsby 2006).

1.3 Art and Culture: Aesthetics, Ideals and Economics

The terms ‘art’ and ‘culture’ continue to be applied as interchangeable and synonymous (Throsby 2006: Mills 2006: Rowse 1985) disguising entangled but distinct aesthetic, social and economic references. Works of art are evaluated as excellent, in opposition and elevated above commercial entertainment, produced for the masses (Rowse 1985). Cultural policy advocates funding programs that promote both social and economic development. Therefore the community cultural development sector is aimed at growing social capital, tending to target in particular, geographic clusters of populations identified as economically disadvantaged and/or socially marginal. At the same time, government cultural policies promote cultural and creative industries as drivers of economic growth.

\textsuperscript{19} In October 2009 the former Labor Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett instigated a public forum on the question of a national Australian cultural policy, and the results can be found at http://www.apo.org.au/research/national-cultural-policy-discussion-framework
The cultural industries are defined as the modes of production and organisation of industrial corporations to produce and disseminate symbols in the form of cultural goods and services as commodities (Garnham 1987: 25), and these include cultural infrastructure such as galleries, libraries and museums. “The Creative Industries” is a term coined in the UK in 1997 to denote exploitation of intellectual property, in response to global technological shifts where individual creative potential is identified as a key economic driver emerging out of the digital revolution (Henkel & Randall 2005:2). The consequent knowledge economy is founded on a highly educated creative class, viewed as valuable human capital (Florida 2002).

Post-industrial knowledge or information economies have been catapulted from manufacturing and service markets, into the digital age emanating from technological advances in communication and information processing. The cultural industries crucially generate and supply innovation as a key resource that drives the economy, as well as producing cultural goods and services. In the ‘new economy’ industry policy encourages national competitiveness

aimed at fostering the creative industries through targeted assistance measures...including investment allowances, tax concessions, subsidies... Strategic competitive advantage in this new commercial environment is supposed to lie with those firms that can maintain a creative edge (Throsby 2006: 38-40).

Australia for instance is viewed as more likely to provide content rather than producing the technologies, and therefore cultural policy advocates a flourishing creative arts sector.
Creativity is a key resource in the so-called knowledge economy, where ideas are products and technology shapes how art is made. In this post-industrial paradigm, capital economies depend on consumption of creative output in the form of cultural industries where the arts, cultural and media sectors have converged into creative industries, contributing significantly to the economy. Innovation is the key to the success of the cultural industries, and popular culture offers goods and services imbued with symbolic meaning in which ‘narrative and its musical equivalent is the most popular form of culture’ (Garnham 1987: 29).

The symbolic value of innovative products provides markers of individual and social difference. This appraisal of cultural goods and services steers marketing and consumption that comprise the cultural industries. Technological innovation drives the manufacture of cultural goods, where the costs of reproduction are marginal in relation to the costs of production, leading to increased audience as the preferred profit maximisation strategy. The success of the cultural industries is founded on the ability to minimise risk, by producing a cultural repertoire spread across a large market. The cultural sector therefore operates as an integrated economic whole, because industries and companies within it compete for scarcity in consumer disposable income, advertising revenue, consumption time and skilled labour (Garnham 1987:26-30).

With the rise of the first world’s knowledge economy, countries such as Australia have been prone to global trade practices undermining unique expressions of cultural identity. The UNESCO 2002 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity \(^{20}\) drafted a Convention on the

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www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf
Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions designed to safeguard the cultural life of countries threatened by global predatory practice. Culture within these terms of reference, is defined as expressions of fundamental values, and the role of cultural policy is to promote and protect cultural diversity, human rights, creativity and international solidarity. Proponents of free trade submit that cultural goods are not exempt and should be treated like any other merchandise. However France and Canada resisted this view and won the right for a 'cultural exception' to apply to such products, which means that these countries can continue to protect their local cultural industries against the market power of major exporters of cultural goods, in particular the United States (Throsby 2006: 25-30).

Global practices of cultural imperialism veer towards homogenisation of the specificity of unique cultures. The thesis argument is illustrated in this context, where cultural policy discourse disguises ideals that normalise a common heritage, as distinct and in ascendance over creative expressions of difference, viewed as marginal (see Chapter 3 in particular 3.1 Marginal Arts, 3.1.1 Scripting Difference as Marginal and 3.1.2 Cultural Activism). The argument that begins to emerge in Chapter 3 is expanded and refined in Chapters 4 and 5. It is found that cultural policy rhetoric implies aesthetic values, social ideals and economic objectives, that target in particular populations constructed as marginal to an idealised mainstream (see in particular 4.6 Local Vernacular Cultures). Chapter 5 proposes storytelling as a critical creative method and practice that holds potential to disrupt tendency towards homogenous expressions of cultural identity. The thesis therefore argues that difference holds the potential to innovate sameness, sapped dry of creative renewal; and culture is described as the telling and making of stories that connect identity with place.
1.4 Local Government: Community Social and Cultural Planning

The persisting debate over whether Australia needs a national cultural policy appears to be an ideological minefield, concealing deep and troubling questions regarding legitimated and authentic creative expressions of a shared national identity. Shifting arguments that either support or are in opposition to funding the community arts, continue to disguise these implied meanings where the term ‘culture’ has come to refer to a conglomeration of simultaneous but distinct meanings.

While the Australia Council’s Community Arts program was founded on cultural democratic ideals advocating ordinary people’s right to engage in creative expressions of Australian identity, there has been a prevailing view that the sector has privileged the cultural fringes at the expense of the broader mainstream. This study finds an underlying consensus that culture does not require to be mandated due to the proximity and therefore the expectation that local government spontaneously represent ‘the community.’ The subsequent devolution of the Australia Council’s Community Arts program to increased responsibility on local government to voluntarily plan and manage community cultural development, is rationalised by the view that local councils are most proximate to representing ‘the community’s’ arts and cultural aspirations (3.2 Local Government Social and Economic Management Role; 3.2.1 Community Driven Cultural Development; 3.5 Local Government Social, Cultural Management Role; 4.2 Local Government CCD Planning and Management; 4.4 Convergence and Partnerships; 4.5 Aesthetic Values, Social Ideals and Economic Objectives; 4.6 Local Vernacular Cultures).
Current cultural policy relies on local government to voluntarily commit to cultural planning, widely regarded as complementary to the mandatory Social and Community Plan. As a result there is increased expectation on local government to demonstrate expanded understanding of ‘culture’ as an integration of social, environmental and economic imperatives. Although it is argued that local government is most proximate to identifying and sustaining community creative aspirations, it is also apparent that state and federal authorities nevertheless shape local and regional arts and cultural programming. State and federal funding is most likely provided for project applications demonstrating investment in cultural infrastructure, designed to grow local and regional economies; and community cultural development programming aimed at building social capital (3.2.2 Creative Industries and Community Cultural Development; 4.3 Funding Shapes Community Cultural Development; 4.4 Convergence and Partnerships).

Emphasis on the arts in the production of social values that facilitate building community (Hawkes 2001) appears to have resulted in a paradigm that relegates culture as a subset of social policy. That is, social and community planning is a mandatory local government requirement, whereas cultural planning is a voluntary commitment, generally linked to the Social and Community Plan. As a consequence of culture not being mandated, a trend appears to have been set where local government relies on self-appointed individuals who initiate local arts and cultural projects that tend toward idealised creative productions of a unified cultural heritage (3.2.1 Community Driven Cultural Development; 3.5 Local Government Social, Cultural Management Role; 4.6 Local Vernacular Cultures).

The research does however identify artists scripted as marginal to a totalising discourse of Australian cultural identity (3.1 Marginal Arts: 3.1.1 Scripting Difference as Marginal) who
nonetheless mobilise social and political change (3.1.2 Cultural Activism). An underlying ethos of cultural activism is to decentralise the artist celebrity who has been co-opted into a ‘mainstream’ economic model of production (Millis 1973). The creative act of collaboration is therefore viewed as more significant than the status of the artist facilitator.

The thesis proposes a model of renewal and innovation, where cultural activist artists tell and make stories as a critical creative practice that holds the potential to innovate idealised expressions of Australian cultural identity. Cultural activist artists tell and make stories as a critical creative method that disrupts discourse implying shifting and conflicting values, ideals and meanings. Cultural activists therefore scratch\textsuperscript{21} and strike\textsuperscript{22} with critical aim at ideologies that confine identity to the periphery, but never quite in the centre. For example two of the study’s interviewed participants raise the example of the western Sydney Urban Theatre Project, cited in one instance as a model of cultural action, while in another exemplified as a case for professional arts development (pp 209).

Arguments in support of community cultural development advocate broadening ‘culture’ from élite connotations, to broader engagement of the ordinary citizenry. Hawkes (2001) for example, argues for a shift from cultural emphasis on economic objectives, to advocating cultural action developed by government methodologies that feature creativity as significant to social and environmental sustainability. Therefore community cultural development programs are funded in population concentrations of racial minorities, and the creative industries policy supports

\textsuperscript{21} Graffiti derives from the Italian word *graffiare* ‘to scratch.’

\textsuperscript{22} *Boomalli*, the name of the Sydney Aboriginal Artists cooperative, is an Indigenous word which means ‘to strike’ or ‘mark’ (Riley & Fisher 1988).
initiatives in regions experiencing economic downturn. Interviewed Arts NSW cultural policy manager Michael Goss, states that cultural planning and creative industry strategies can benefit regional centres with declining populations such as Broken Hill, or those experiencing profound change such as Newcastle and Wollongong (p 212). Their respective local governments have long term tourism and creative industry strategies aimed at counteracting the radical economic changes that have occurred in these areas over the past twenty five years (see 4.4 Convergence and Partnerships).

However this community cultural development paradigm appears to have resulted in targeting particular populations for remedial attention. Rhetoric that legitimises support for the community arts, relegates artistic excellence in ascendancy and responsible for the community development of groups constructed as economically and socially disadvantaged. Creative practitioner Margie exemplifies this point in relating personal and professional benefit gained from working with marginal populations (pp 217-218). The question interviewed arts/cultural policy manager Lois raises relates to this point, in that there is a marked absence of members from these identified marginal groups in professional arts and cultural positions (p 218-219).

The study finds that there has yet to be a comprehensive understanding of collaborative creativity. Application of the arts as utilitarian detracts from understanding an aesthetics of culture defined here as story telling and making. It is argued that the knowledge economy, viewed as driving social, economic and cultural capital, tends toward homogeneity. This thesis
proposes an artist-scholar model where creativity emanates from the friction of boundaries transgressed in the encounter of sameness with difference.\(^\text{23}\)

Continued ambiguity over what is meant by the term ‘community’ has been expedient in relegating individuals and groups holding difference and diverse value systems from an identifiable Australian mainstream, as culturally disadvantaged (Hawkins 1990:3). The community arts constructed as marginal to expressions of a unified cultural heritage, is raised as a significant theme from comparison of participant interviewee summaries detailed in Chapter 2; discussed in Section 3.4 Marginal Arts, and expanded in Section 4.1 Artistic Virtuosity and the Cultural Fringes. In Chapter 5 the thesis explores storytelling as a critical creative method and practice that holds potential to disrupt disguised meanings in rhetoric, tending to support public funding of idealised expressions of a unified national cultural identity.

1.5 Arts-Based Research Method and Practice

The research identifies storytelling as a critical method that informs the practice of cultural activism. Storytelling as a critical creative method and practice triggers new ways of thinking. Slattery (2003) for example outlines an arts-based research method that deconstructs identities in the creation of unique visceral experience. McClintock (2004) details storytelling as a narrative method that documents and evaluates projects, incorporating qualitative expressive/artistic practical skills that is complementary to analytical methods. Dart & Davies (2003) also describe a narrative research method where story is selected and processed as data content analysis.

\(^{23}\) Duxbury, Grierson, & Waite (2008) for example describe artist-researchers who examine a problem to be solved in a creative process as a trigger to new ways of thinking that generates knowledge and understanding (9-11).
Interviewed creative practitioner Vandana applies this storytelling method that aims to measure the impact of the community arts sector. She cites the Most Significant Change Theory of this narrative method, where creative projects are evaluated by documenting stories in the performing and digital arts that map

emotional and different types of ways people react...It’s about the narrative...all our projects have narratives...document all the time...allow the participants to record their own response [which] shape that process... For example a project I evaluated recently featured a man from Iran who said “The sun sets in a different place in my country.” Just to use that as a quote is powerful because it gives a sense of the person coming from somewhere else, rather than stating “We have a really culturally diverse group here.”

Vandana maintains that cultural workers need to document and evaluate their work in developing a critical theoretical model of community cultural development. This method aims to clarify a method of community arts planning and management that demonstrates the impact of the sector to policy makers, funding bodies and the wider community (p 178). Storytelling therefore emerges as a cultural aesthetic that gives expression to the specific culture of place. Vernacular cultures are described as the collective expression of identity in relation to the specific culture of place (see 3.3.1 Storytelling and Cultural Identity). Tredinnick (2005) corroborates what the thesis finds in relation to stories that connect to land, in how women transmit knowledge through storytelling (5.1.1 Stories, Culture, Identity and Place; 5.1.2 Women Storytellers).

This kind of arts-based narrative research method supports the study’s proposal for a critical creative practice that fleshes meaning in the telling of story, connecting identity with place. Interviewed creative practitioner Lyndon for example demonstrates the diversity in artist
facilitated community collaborative creativity, as he believes that innovation emanates from the specific culture of a place, which he elaborates in the monograph *A Regional State of Mind: Making Art Outside Metropolitan Australia* (Terracini 2007). In the interview for this study, Lyndon says every town, suburb and city in Australia

*has its own culture...need to identify exactly what those cultures are...they all make this extraordinary mosaic or tapestry...no such thing as an Australian identity...someone who comes from Cooktown for example has a very different view of the world than someone who comes from Sydney. So their identity is very, very different.*

Related to this theme is Carter’s (2004) position as migrant, reframing mythopoetic spaces in collaborative aesthetic recreations of relationship to place. While acknowledging the emergence of geo-cultural translations of identities in relation to land, this research also attempts to understand the stories that reverberate in country, as examined in 5.1.2 Women Storytellers.

### 1.6 Narrative Theory

Narrative theory describes story as unfolding in present time. Storytelling as an arts-based narrative method ruptures master narratives by opening signifiers to multiple readings.

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24 Ricoeur (1991:3-7) discusses how human experience in the temporal dimension never ceases to be shaped. The act of telling marks, organises and clarifies temporal experience as the principle element unifying the multiple forms of narrative.

25 Barone & Eisner (1997:75-78) detail an arts-based narrative sequential structure of contextualised artistic language favored by novelists, biographers, ethnographers and social scientists. In this way “thick” literary descriptions (Geertz 1993) contextualise characters, events and/or settings which allow for complexities to be rendered. Non-technical language that expresses the meaning of experience rather than emphasising theoretical abstracts, is described as trans-disciplinary and accessible to outsiders.

26 Edward Said theorised from the perspective of being marginal, which broadened academic discourse to postmodernist sensibilities (Ashcroft 2003).
Knowing expands in a pulsating being-in-time,\textsuperscript{30} eroding certainty in a polyphonic layering of interpretive possibility. Translations slip between the cracks of the sign and its referent.\textsuperscript{31} Scholarship therefore attempts to articulate meaning encoded in stories that transmit knowledge\textsuperscript{32} across generations.\textsuperscript{33}

Dissanayake (2000) explains how meaning is regulated in narrative sequencing, as a biological attunement between mother and child. Encoded sensory information in creative works is perceived by the body’s senses where knowledge is translated cognitively. The intellect reflects on the experience of feeling in order to understand the meaning encoded as sensory information. Akira Tatehata Curator at the National Museum of Art in Osaka for example, is taken by surprise by his autonomic response viewing Emily Kame Kngwarreye’s painting \textit{Big Yam Dreaming}. His involuntary reaction crying at the sight of this painting, led Tatehata to exhaustively analyse Kngwarreye’s work.

\textsuperscript{27} The rupture of the relationship of the sign to its referent underpins the crisis of representation examined by post modernists, post structuralists and post colonialists.

\textsuperscript{29} Examples of academic writing that cross the academic/personal boundary include Hurston (1986), Allison (1994) and Behar (1996).

\textsuperscript{30} A creative work reveals ‘something other than itself.’ This perspective calls into question Aristotle’s mimetic representation of an ideal unity of self; a metaphysics hackneyed by concepts such as form and content (Heidegger 1999:145 \textit{The Origin of the Work of Art}. In David Krell (ed), Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings, cited in Grierson 2006:7-8).

\textsuperscript{31} Blonsky (1985) postulates that the sign is not the sensation. A referent such as text can only suggest the affect to which it points.

\textsuperscript{32} Mueke (1997) writes of language imprinted as knowledge in body scarification (87-88). He proposes that scholarship integrate affective inter-subjectivity in the practice of academic writing (171).

\textsuperscript{33} Social biologist Richard Dawkins identified how ideas are self-replicating units that trigger cultural evolution with mutations occurring in imitation (Dawkins 1976:189-192).
noting the way she uses lines of different thicknesses and frequencies; the root-like traceries behind the billowing clouds of coloured dots; the interplay of tones and half-tones, of forms within forms (McDonald 2008).

Dissanayake (2000) analyses the patterned meaning between mother and child that foregrounds speech, poetry, music and dance. Vocal kinesthetic modulation musically regulates the emotional bond between mother and child during the extended dependency of the infant on its mother. Pre-lingual vocalisation is shaped by rhythmic and spatial dynamics that is imbued with emotional narrative meaning. Mother and child modulate each other’s vocalisation and movement in kinesthetic and sound imitation, and this regulation occurring at split second durations, renders communication outside human conscious control. Imitation of temporal spatial interaction reinforces affiliation where synchronised symbiotic attunement shapes neuro-physiological patterning (Dissanayake 2000:395). Davidson (2007) also proposes the theory as an explanation for the ubiquity of human music across cultures. In applying this theoretical pre-supposition, the thesis claims that storytelling has biological determinants, where meaning is embedded in pre-lingual codes that transmit knowledge in image, dance, music and word cross culturally and trans-generationally.

Spencer argues that biological patterned meaning is embedded as codes, decipherable to the initiate (1994:xi-xxiii). Therefore, African rhythmic codes are shown to have revitalised sagging western music, re-imaged in a continuum of black consciousness from the spiritual, gospel, soul, blues, jazz and hip hop (Abrahams 1970:6). Australian Indigenous songwriter Archie Roach
demonstrates this in song that narrates affiliation of kinship ties. Langton (1988) also confirms that the continuity of traditional customary law in contemporary Aboriginal life is deciphered in conduct, appearing to the outsider as fighting and brawling, but in fact is highly regulated by rules that sustain close social bonds.

Stories across cultures are layered with esoteric meaning where an initiate is charged with integrating stages of transition. Daivid Unaipon tells the story of Mungingee, the Australian Aboriginal name for the cluster of sister stars also known as the Pleiades, where the seven sisters endure wounding rites for the sake of the collective (Unaipon 2001:145-149). The Greek story of Psyche and Eros is an allegory of integration between intuitive knowing and rational reasoning where Psyche suffers the wrath of Aphrodite, and is set tasks which appear to be beyond her ability. Men’s work is also narrated in stories of trials and injury. Parsifal in the Fisher King is on a hero quest that begins in a forest, symbol of the unconscious, where his task is to separate from the mother principle in an integration of the feminine.

Folk tales tell of a woman’s task to connect with voicing intuitive wisdom and knowledge. From two cultures, a story of a young abandoned boy recurs during the course of this study, pointing to the prescribed social role of women as carers and nurturers. The Papua New Guinean Kaluli version tells of a younger brother unable to catch crayfish, and who vainly requests his older sister to give him what she finds. The sister continually refuses her younger brother, and in

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34 Archie Roach (1990) Charcoal Lane.
35 Munya Andrews (2004:5) says women’s sacred stories are complex and secret. A child is introduced to more complicated elements of the same myth on reaching adolescence.
36 Gilligan (2002) writes that Pleasure is the baby girl born from the union between Psyche and Eros.
37 Emma Jung with Marie-Louise von Franz (1980:39) narrates the Chrétien de Troyes version of the Perceval myth, dated circa 1180 AD.
38 Carol Christ (1980) draws on the literary works of Kate Chopin, Margaret Atwood, Doris Lessing, Adrienne Rich and Ntozake Shange in search of the feminine voice silenced in traditional sacred texts.
his desperation the boy turns into a Muni bird that flies away, with his sister vainly calling after him. The Kaluli myth of The Boy Who Became a Muni Bird is the bond that prescribes social roles, performed in ritual song and dance. The women enact the story and are moved to song, which triggers the men to weep (Feld 1990:20). A similar Australian Indigenous story is told in Oenpelli of a small orphan boy who is crying because his adoptive family refuses to share a catch of yams with him. A sympathetic older brother summons the Rainbow Serpent who angrily rises up and devours the greedy family. The boy and his brother are transformed into rocks that are still seen today by a local water-hole (Spivey 2005:119).

Garnham (1987:20) describes the symbolic production of narrative and its musical equivalent as the most popular form of culture. However Duxbury, Grierson and Waite (2008:8) argue that transmission of meaning in the digital information economy reduces knowledge to fast transfer that is instrumental to growing social and cultural capital.

This thesis investigates the idea that innovation can be found in the creative work of personal interpretation. Abrahams (1970) for example asserts that the individual singer draws on an emotional palette that innovates a song with idiosyncratic timbral and rhythmic interpretation. Abrahams recorded Appalachian folk singer Almeda Riddle who explains that tradition-bearers are in service of the song, rather than making the song subject to the performer.

Knowledge encoded in song and dance is transmitted over generations and across the millennia. This is exemplified by documented Aboriginal performance where visual images provide cues for stories that are sung and danced. Filmmakers emulated this by synchronising images with sound
in performance in 1894. This innovation provided the catalyst for converging the arts with the cultural and media sectors that has been driving the global audio-visual creative marketplace.\(^{39}\)

Performance ‘tourists’ imitate the exotic, frequently mistaken as innovation.\(^{40}\) For example from the late 1970s the Australia Council funded in the main, Anglo-Australian musicians and administrators who tended to exploit government policy aimed at promoting multicultural creative works. These performances are critiqued for rendering a superficial musical experience of profound ethnic traditions (Smith & Brett 2001:48-49). However, it is argued here, following Frank (1995) that “telling the self” can convey an inexpressible incoherence.\(^{41}\)

Attempts continue to diminish sensory knowing by leaning towards singular and uncomplicated interpretation.\(^{42}\) The research expands the notion of a unified mainstream in exploring how story expresses the multiplicity of identities in relation to place (5.1.1 Stories, Culture, Identity and Place). In this context, the research proposes storytelling as a critical creative method that transmits knowledge and meaning, where feeling is a catalyst for thinking (5.1 Cultural Activism). The study’s gestalt design explores an arts-based method where research can be

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\(^{39}\) Art Historian Nigel Spivey (2005) proposes that filmmaking is in debt to atavistic precedents of arranging 'sequences' of images in formal patterning of plot and characterisation embedded in the practice of storytelling (86-87). The significant feature of Aboriginal storytelling is the cohesion of music, dance and recital where visual images act as cues in the sequence of telling a story which is sung and danced for many hours and at times over days (119-120).

\(^{40}\) Herndon & McLeod (1980) propose that creativity is a misnomer for highly formulaic rehearsal aimed at replicating a set canon of performance.

\(^{41}\) Frank (1995) talks about chaos stories that have no narrative sequence which are formational in telling the self.

\(^{42}\) Hinkson (2008) for example challenges Jennifer Biddle’s transcription of Central Desert women’s art as sensual experience (2007) by arguing that Aboriginal art simplified to iconographic description of story engages rather than alienates the viewer with abstract complexity. Hinkson also iterates assertion ‘that the wonderful thing about Aboriginal art is that it is not political’ which is a claim refuted by comprehensive documentation of Aboriginal art as cultural activism, discussed at length in relation to the Boomalli artists cooperative (see 5.1 Cultural Activism).
transcribed as poetry, data is sung, analysis painted and findings performed. The research method is outlined in the following section.

1.7 Narrative Interview Method

The study applies a narrative method that guides the interview encounter of collaborative dialogue between participant and researcher. The interview narrative method is designed to elicit participant response of stories as lived experience. Research questions were designed to provide cues rather than restricting response, so that participants were encouraged to tell their story in their own words (McAdams 1993; Sandelowski 1991; Polkinghorne 1988).

Interviewed creative practitioners were selected so as to shed light on grassroots arts and cultural enterprise; while questions asked of arts and cultural policy managers intended to broaden understanding of the impact of government policy on community creative practice. Due to the initial aims of the study and questions asked of selected participants, the investigation turned to illuminating the values disguised in defining what is art; unraveling disguised social ideals in merging ‘art’ with ‘culture,’ and clarifying embedded economic objectives in Australian cultural policy.

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43 Ethnodrama interprets research interviews as play scripts (Mienczakowski 1994:45-54).
44 Riessman (1993:17) explains that there is no single definition of narrative method and she goes on to detail a number of conflicting descriptions.
45 O’Sullivan (2006) describes an encounter where the researcher’s own knowledges are open to disruption.
46 Wengraf (2007) for example outlines the Biographic Narrative Interview Method that begins with a single question (SQUIN) designed to elicit maximum response from the participant without interruption from the researcher who is trained to look for PINs or Particular Incident Narratives. This method is designed to draw the respondent out of the narrating past into the feeling present, which the retelling of personal story evokes.
A narrative method guides the interviewed participant to tell stories that elicit significant themes (Hollway & Jefferson 2000:70). Critical enquiry is defined as a discursive dialogue between researcher and participant. Analysis and interpretation is negotiated in composing the various strands that create the structure and form of the work.\footnote{A gestalt narrative approach opens up the enquiry to the unexpected, where interpretive analysis aims for a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Contradictions and inconsistencies may be significant in identifying parts by their relationship to the system as a whole in which they function (Hollway & Jefferson 2000:70-77). This method complements an analytic or deductive approach in allowing the unexpected to come into view.}

The following excerpt illustrates this reflexive paradigm where the researcher draws on insight, keeping a gestalt whole in mind while simultaneously undertaking analysis, allowing scope for the unexpected to emerge. Interviewed creative practitioner Lyndon raises the topic of homogeneity in relation to regulation of the arts in Australia:

Lyndon: ....*People say there’s no money to do projects and all that sort of thing. It’s very rarely about money.*

Elizabeth: *It’s about vision?*

L: *Exactly as you said.*

\footnote{Clare (2003:140) discusses how discursive dialogue between researcher and participant guides writing data into text.}
E: Vision and having an innovation into something that’s been done and is not working or just working at a substandard level?

L: Just thinking about what you do. Most people don’t think about what they’re doing. They just do it because that’s always how they’ve done it. And if you keep doing what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always had.

E: Is that in relation to working collaboratively, or is it about having a leader at the helm like a Director who says ‘this is how it should be’?

L: I think it varies. Some people find it much more stimulating working with other people. Others find it more stimulating to have time on their own to think things through.

E: It depends on the individual in a position of responsibility?

L: Yes.

E: So one style doesn’t fit all?

L: No, exactly. And I think that is exactly right about the work that we make, how we make it, how you run an organisation; one style doesn’t fit all. One style that fits all is McDonalds. And once you’re into that, you see the same show all over the world. And who wants to do that?
E: Do we have more chance of doing that in a country like Australia? Are there more opportunities that we have because we are the way that we are?

L: Yes I think so. I think we have tremendous opportunities. To just look at old European models and say, “Maybe that doesn’t work. Maybe there’s a better way to do it.” For example you’ll find French wine makers will get American oak barrels and age their wine in American oak barrels for three years and so on. Australian wine makers will get a shovel full of oak chips and throw it in the barrel; it has the same effect. So it’s just thinking about things differently. What is it you’re trying to get out of it? Ok you want a bit more oak taste in the wine, well throw a shovel of oak chips in – you haven’t to buy a barrel.

E: So you are saying that the country is in good shape because we have a diversity of voice. We’re not stuck...?

L: No, we’re trying to homogenise everything, and I think the Arts are far too regulated.

E: Are we talking about an American style of homogenising?

L: I just think it’s a convenient way for governments to control every aspect of what we do. If it’s homogenised, then gee it’s easy. If it’s extremely diverse, then it’s not.
E: It’s not about a government model of organisation and management. Is it about individual enterprise and being able to develop models that are outside of government control?

L: Yes, I think we should always strive to have really original ideas, and to act on those ideas.

The theme of homogeneity was not originally in the enquiry’s view, but emerges as a significant motif while processing interview transcripts applying the study’s gestalt method (see 2.2 Gestalt Method).

Clare (2003) describes critical social science that emanates from the discursive dialogue between participant and researcher. Amplitude is allowed for both players to analyse and interpret meaning. In this way storytelling emerges as a significant theme and is proposed as an arts-based research method and a critical creative practice, that can expand disguised and implied meanings (6.1 Arts-Based Narrative Research Method; 6.2 Cultural Activism: A Critical Creative Practice).

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) outline a gestalt method of analysing and interpreting interview transcripts that does not attempt to iron out contradictions in search of linear consistency. Analysed parts can therefore be identified in the system as a whole in which they function (70). Story told in image, music, dance, word and performance embodies meaning in a field of play, also described by Richardson (1997) who writes a poetics of social science. Polanyi (1967) defines a gestalt paradigm as knowing more than can be told which is illustrated in the interview with Creative Practitioner Nyree. The interstitial character of Nyree’s narrative only became
evident in the gestalt interpretation of her interview transcript. Here Nyree explains the motivation for selling her paintings:

Some people were looking at that one with the night sky and they were looking at it more as a sort of investment. They weren’t touched. And I thought, “I don’t want you to have it.”... They’ve got to go to the right people... They’ve got to go to the right home... A woman came to Art 05 last year. She was from Switzerland...and she just wanted that painting... and we took it down to where they lived and it was a bloody big mansion. I couldn’t believe my girls were going to live there. She said “I want it on that wall. Can you put it on the wall?” And as soon as I put the girls on the wall she said, “That’s it!”... She was emailing me back and forth saying “The girls are well.”...She sent me an email to say “We’re going back to Switzerland.” But she said “I just want to tell you the girls will be nice and warm when we’re over there.”

The storytelling theme that becomes increasingly prominent throughout the course of the research was not evident during the interview, but surfaces in the transcript analysis and interpretation phase. During this stage of the study, it became clear that Nyree was describing what this thesis eventually proposes in relation to story. Stories transmit meaning where feeling is a catalyst for critical thinking. This is examined in detail in Chapter 5 Story: Telling Cultural Identities.

The gestalt method described in this chapter analyses parts while retaining a sense of the whole. It therefore became evident how story can reveal meaning in the in-between. In this way storytelling became a significant theme in outlining how the narrative arts encode meaning in music, dance, word, image and performance that trigger critical thinking. Bennett (2005)
describes how visual art directly engages with sensation embedded in the work, and quotes Deleuze in explaining that the sign is felt rather than perceived through cognition, so that feeling is a catalyst for critical enquiry or deep thought (7).

The interview narrative method was designed as a collaborative dialogue between researcher and participant, and that allowed the enquiry to open up to the unexpected. Chapter 2 describes the applied gestalt method that guided the analysis and interpretation of each of the participants raw interview data (see Volume 2 Parts A & B). Each participant interview is profiled and summarised into topics and themes. Chapter 3 draws on these topics and themes in an integrated discussion that comprises an emerging thesis argument. The thesis argument is further refined in Chapters 4 and 5, in the context of reviewed literature and applied theoretical paradigms. The four-stage interpretive analytic gestalt method applied by the study, is detailed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 2 Research Design

The research investigates the community arts and the impact of cultural policy on the field of collective creativity. Creative practitioners were selected for interview in relation to their community arts practice; and participant arts and cultural policy managers were chosen due to their role implementing cultural policy.

2.1 Interviewed Participants

Seventeen participants were interviewed for this study, comprised of six arts and cultural policy managers and eleven creative practitioners. Arts and cultural policy managers consisted of a regional local government General Manager; a Community and Cultural Services Director; two Regional Arts Development Officers; an Arts NSW cultural planner; and a private cultural consultant. These are shown in the following table:
Table 1 Interviewed Arts/Cultural Policy Managers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Regional Arts and Cultural Policy Managers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lois: Arts Northern Rivers Regional Arts Development Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah: Arts OutWest Regional Arts Development Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce: Oberon Local Council General Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesley: Bathurst Regional Council Community Cultural Development Director 48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Metropolitan Arts and Cultural Policy Managers</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deborah: Community Cultural Development Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael: Arts NSW Cultural Development Program Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The term arts and cultural policy manager is applied due to cultural policy generally being viewed as arts policy (see Cultural Policy entry in the Glossary p vi and discussion about this p 182). Arts and cultural policy managers were selected for interview with the aim of understanding how public policy impacts on the community arts. Interview questions asked description of position; how policy frames service delivery; the role of funding; definition of ‘culture’ and ‘community,’ and personal aspirations (see Appendix 1.1 Volume 2 Part A).

The term creative practitioner refers to participants who identify as community artists, cultural workers, artworkers, arts/artist facilitators, community cultural development (CCD) practitioners, community educators, cultural activists, and/or community performance coordinators (see Community Art and Community Artists entry in the Glossary p v). The eleven participants interviewed comprise a community choir coordinator; three Indigenous community

48 Lesley was in a supervisory capacity of Creative Practitioner Margie, also a participant of this study.
educators; a performance coordinator; three visual artists; a writer; a children’s dance coordinator and a festivals director, depicted in the table below (Table 2):

**Table 2 Interviewed Creative Practitioners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Indigenous Creative Practitioners</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jodie: Visual Artist/Community Educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane: Community Educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa: Writer/ Community Educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill: Community Educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria: Community Educator/ Storyteller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyree: Visual Artist/Community Artist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Non-Indigenous Creative Practitioners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruth: Community Choir Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tere: Children’s Polynesian Dance Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margie: Theatre-maker/Community Performance Development 49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan Creative Practitioners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vandana: Community Artist/Visual Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyndon: Artistic Festival Director/Professional Singer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Creative practitioners were interviewed with the aim of shedding light on community arts and cultural practice, and these respondents were asked questions about their arts background; funding for their project; how they defined ‘culture’ and ‘community’; vision underpinning how

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49 At the time of interview, Margie was employed by the Bathurst Regional Council which was a position accountable to participating arts/cultural policy manager Lesley.
their community project was implemented; whether they identified as professional and/or voluntary, and educational aspects of their enterprise (see Appendix 1.3 Volume 2 Part B).

### 2.2 Gestalt Method

Selected arts and cultural policy managers addressed questions in relation to arts and cultural planning and management. The eleven creative practitioners interviewed were chosen due to their role in community arts and cultural practice. Creative practitioners were asked questions about their community practice, which addressed the thesis enquiry into creative expression in the ordinary and everyday (see Volume 2 Appendix 1.3). Interviews with arts and cultural policy managers aimed at understanding the impact of government policy on community creative enterprise (see Volume 2 Appendix 1.1)

A gestalt interpretive analytic method guided how interview transcripts (see Volume 2 Appendices for individual interview transcripts) were analysed and interpreted in a sequence of stages:

1. Transcript Analysis: Preliminary Topics
2. Pro Forma Interpretive Summary: Theme Induction
3. Inducted Analysis Summary: Theme Summary
4. Themes Discussion: Integrated Themes Discussion

An inductive method synthesises separate elements into an inclusive whole (Herndon 1974) that is kept in mind while analysing the component parts (Hollway & Jefferson 2000). This gestalt narrative method guides the researcher who looks for the in-between (Polanyi 1958). Smith
(2000) describes a methodology of interpreting interview data that is more than the information conveyed (36-37) which Bird (2004) explains as listening to talk that sings. This gestalt design opens up enquiry to what is not originally in sight, where contradictions and inconsistencies may reveal parts that are significant to the system as a whole in which they function (Hollway & Jefferson 2000: 70-77).

The following example demonstrates this gestalt method applied in analysing and interpreting arts and cultural policy manager Lesley’s interview (Volume 2 Part A). Here Lesley raises the theme regarding expansion of the meaning of ‘culture’ from aesthetic references to broader social and economic indicators (4.4 Convergence and Partnerships). Ambiguity over what is meant by the term ‘community’ in relation to local cultural expressions, tending to homogeneity is also prevalent (4.1 Artistic Virtuosity and the Cultural Fringes).

Lesley: …a cultural policy is not an arts policy, and it’s really important that it covers the whole sector of cultural industry; that’s it’s not just about the visual arts program.

Elizabeth: What is your vision of culture. How do you define ‘culture’?

L: Again that’s something that really has to come from the community, and so I’m just guessing at the moment. But car racing is part of Bathurst culture. It’s a really strong component of this place. It drives a whole lot of different events and activities. So it’s not just about the arts, and it’s not just about performance or dance. It’s got a whole lot of different things, and it’s got to be about what the community identifies with.
The thesis theme regarding increased expectation on local government to manage community cultural development emerges in the interview. The following excerpt demonstrates that although there is expectation on local government to voluntarily manage community cultural development, funding authorities nevertheless direct local cultural programs (see 3.2 Local Government Social and Economic Cultural Management Role; 4.3 Funding Shapes Community Cultural Development; 4.4 Convergence and Partnerships):

Lesley:…*State and federal funding is now being made available for local governments who have got a Cultural Plan in place. So what they’re gradually doing is, these state government departments are saying, “Well unless you can show us that you’ve got a bit of a plan in place, we’re not going to fund a project that could be just a one off. So we’ve got to see there’s a vision there.” And that’s how you come back and say “Well we’ve got to start doing that planning with the community.”… I think the worst part about grants is that you very rarely get an untied grant so you’ve got to fit in with different categories… It’s really about what sort of funding becomes available and who wants what…grants driving projects. And that’s where people get quite resentful. Because you end up shaping a program to fit whatever grant monies are available* (p 90).

This gestalt method guided analysis of raw interview data into component parts while simultaneously keeping the whole in mind. Application of this methodology to each interview demonstrates that in the context of literature and theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, the term ‘culture’ refers to a conglomeration of simultaneous but distinct aesthetic, social and economic references. The persisting ambiguity over what is meant by ‘the community’ is
also evident where universalising scripts of national cultural identity relegates difference as marginal.

A gestalt method guides interview analysis and interpretation as shown in Figure 6 below:

**Figure 6 Gestalt Method**

Participants were forwarded summaries at each of the induction and interpretive analytical phases with a request for feedback, and these responses were incorporated into the study.

The following section details the first, second and third stages of the gestalt method, where raw interviews were sequenced into emerging themes to compose individual analysed and interpreted summaries. The thesis argument is drawn from the final stage of the gestalt method comparing participant themes and topics (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5).
2.3 Participant Transcript Interpretive Analysis Summaries

This section provides the inducted summaries from the first three phases of the gestalt method. Raw interview transcripts were analysed and interpreted applying the gestalt method, described in the previous section. In the first phase, recorded interview transcripts were sequenced into topics, which were then condensed into Pro Forma Interpretive Summaries, followed by further analysis and interpretation into Inducted Analysis Summaries.

2.3.1 Lois Arts Northern Rivers RADO

Lois is the Regional Arts Development Officer (RADO) and Executive Officer of Arts Northern Rivers. Arts Northern Rivers core program is to promote networking between the various cultural event organisers at Regional Sector and Regional Forum meetings. Arts Northern Rivers has developed strategic priority areas a) community cultural development b) creative industry development c) Indigenous cultural development and d) cultural tourism. The Strategic Plan is a three-year guideline Arts Northern Rivers implements in delivering cultural services to the region. However, each project is dealt with individually, and guidelines are developed as the project is formulated.

Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Funding

Arts Northern Rivers works with, and is funded by the seven Northern Rivers local governments comprising the region. Core funding is 60% from local councils, and Lois applies for the remainder of the funding with projects that address gaps identified by the community. Her
funding application role is such a specialist thing. Funding bodies such as the Regional Arts Fund finances arts and community cultural development programs including the Visual Arts Network and youth arts, which is supplementary to the Arts Northern Rivers core function. Most of the funding for non-core project development comes from state and federal regional development agencies such as the Department of State and Regional Development (Industry and Development) and Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services, which are geared toward regional economic development:

"Department of Transport and Regional Services has provided hundreds of thousands of dollars into arts infrastructure...because in this region we can argue economic benefit...but in other parts of the country they wouldn’t do that."

Lois must demonstrate the measurable outcomes in meeting these funding organisations’ criteria. Arts Northern Rivers has developed partnerships with a range of funding health and welfare community organisations. The key factor to successful funding applications is to

"develop professional relationships first with the regional representatives of all of these agencies, and then work together with them to develop proposals."

Community Cultural Development

Community Cultural Development is variously seen as art, cultural, social and/or economic development, depending on the funding organisation’s criteria for supporting programs. Funding pure art, art for art’s sake is pretty small in this country. Artists accept that being on the dole

50 Italics denotes verbatim transcript quote.
finances their work, which Lois sees as not validating what they do. Government funding should also incorporate artists’ work not aimed at commercial industry, just as sport is comprehensively supported. Lois gives an example of this type of local government spending:

$2M a year cutting the grass in its sports field, but that same council is reluctant in putting money into supporting arts infrastructure...if you want your community to be healthy, then you have to facilitate participation in culture and people’s ability to express their culture through the arts.

Regional Arts NSW thirteen Regional Arts Boards across the state have developed a huge diversity of programs because they have responded to the various needs and opportunities of their specific regions.

Indigenous Artists

A new project in development is an Indigenous artist group made up of six people drawn from a larger forum. Cath Fogarty and Indigenous Business Development Manager Craig Jenkins facilitate this group, in partnership with the Department of State and Regional Development (DSRD). Rather than steering the project, Cath and Craig facilitate the group in developing the framework and guidelines. There are many Indigenous artists in the Northern Rivers who are not supported because of absence of artworkers in Lois’ position, who would develop partnerships with funding bodies to facilitate programs aimed at building Indigenous artist experience, skills and capacity;
to my knowledge, there are no Indigenous artsworkers anywhere in regional NSW...I just think that is a massive issue.

Communities are aware how to address the lack of support for Indigenous art in the Northern Rivers

but there is no one to really help them through the long, hard, torturous paths of developing those projects and getting the funding.

Both Creative Industries and Community Cultural Development are models aimed at addressing non-representation of Indigenous artists in the mainstream arts and cultural sector. Lois has applied to the Federal Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) to develop an arts project with a group of Indigenous visual arts, which has been in the planning stages for a year. DCITA has shown support for the project for cultural as well as economic interests. Lois hopes to contribute towards developing an independent and successful regional Indigenous arts enterprise. A major obstacle to realising this aim is that it takes so long to get every single grant...to build the capacity of the artists and the communities. Lois has applied for funding for an outreach worker to work with those artists to help them develop some sort of artist-run organisation.

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51 An announcement was made by Federal Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett that funding will be provided for A survey and marketing project to be conducted by Arts Northern Rivers in northern NSW to boost the profile of Indigenous artists from this region. Retrieved 18 March 2008 from http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/garrett/2008/pubs/mr20080307.pdf. As pointed out in 4.4 Convergence and Partnerships, this outcome demonstrates Lois’ recognised success in applying evidence-based research in funding submissions.
Creative Industries

In May 2006 Lois together with Cathy Henkel presented a case study in Sydney to the Department of State and Regional Development (DSRD), in relation to successful funding partnerships that have fostered regional cultural programs. The aim of the presentation was to provide the various federal and state organisations with ideas on how to develop whole-of-government creative industry policy in regional Australia. It is difficult for communities to access the same level of government funding in geographical areas where a professional arts industry is not already established. The Creative Industries is about developing an economic base from the arts, although Lois believes there is a need for community cultural development everywhere. Art that is not about product is crucial to the cultural health of the nation.

Cathy Henkel who is also a filmmaker, is

*doing her PhD [at Queensland University of Technology] in creative industries in regional communities...doing research in other countries in Scotland, US, New Zealand...looking at how different communities have approached that industry development, and what works as far as policy interventions [and] what doesn’t work.*

People working in the creative industries are moving away from the metropolitan areas, and the Northern Rivers is one of several regions experiencing commensurate population growth. Creative Industries is one of several economic policies government agencies support, because the model encourages business and employment opportunities in a high unemployment region that will have minimal impact on the coastal community environment. Government agencies such as
the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS) and Aus Industry approach Arts Northern Rivers with proposals to run arts specific home-based business seminars.

Research
Arts Northern Rivers has collaborated with Queensland University of Technology, where research data demonstrates the economic impact of the arts, crucial to government funding regional infrastructure. Government funding has a huge impact on the continuing cultural development of the region. Cathy Henkel’s research demonstrated that the Northern Rivers had reached critical mass with 4.1% of the workforce engaged in the creative industries, which led to Arts NSW establishing Arts Northern Rivers. Lois facilitates a network comprised of the eighteen festivals and events organisations in the region. A common issue identified by this group was audience and marketing. Lois compiled a report with Regional Arts NSW detailing marketing and audience research data from these festival and event organisations. The report provides a snapshot of where audience comes from, and the marketing strategies used to reach them.

Personal Vision
Lois is committed to promoting the Northern Rivers as a nationally recognised centre for the arts. Regional cultural activity needs to be connected to metropolitan art making and recognised as equally valid.

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Pro Forma Interpretive Summary

Government funding promotes the Creative Industries strategy, although cultural development draws on grassroots creativity.

The Creative Industries policy encourages partnerships between agencies to share resources, where these programs were traditionally funded separately.

Government agency funding selects Community Cultural Development programs that are supported in relation to art, cultural, social and/or economic indicators.

Art that has political, social and cultural significance is relegated to the margins by government funding that prioritises art, primarily of commercial value.

There is an absence of Indigenous artworkers in NSW who can promote Indigenous artists and build capacity.

Both the Creative Industries and Community Cultural Development models can promote Indigenous art.

Attaining success in project funding applications depends on developing good relationships with key people within the funding bodies.

Cultural enrichment needs to be a mutual exchange between the regions and the city.
Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary

• Community cultural development and creative industries
• Social economic funding application criteria
• Local government cultural management role
• Funding shapes arts and cultural development
• Regional Arts NSW successful model of cultural development
• Creative Industries: Partnerships share resources
• Regional arts
• Indigenous arts

2.3.2 Deborah: Community Cultural Development Consultant

Deborah is a private cultural consultant who has over thirty years experience working in community and cultural development. She also served on the Australia Council Community Cultural Development Unit for five years while Donald Horne chaired the Council. Deborah wrote the Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government (2004).

Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Cultural Development Role

Deborah has over thirty years experience working in community and cultural development. She is currently a freelance consultant, providing cultural policy advice to federal, state and local government. Deborah assists local government in cultural planning, and is also asked to advise senior management in the private and public sectors on organisational and leadership

development. Deborah applies community cultural development principles particularly in her work with local government, aiming to

*give people an insight into their own understanding of culture, what it means to them and how they might apply this understanding to how they plan for, and with communities.*

Community Cultural Development Policy

The Australia Council Community Arts Board established in 1975 *had a very broad policy approach...flexible and responsive* which helped start up the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, West Community Theatre and the Murray River Performing Group *that have now...evolved into groups like Urban Theatre Projects and so on.* There have been consistent attempts within the Australia Council to divest funding from community arts. Donald Horne wrote 55 of attempts by Barry Cohen...Minister for the Arts under a Federal Labor Government led by Bob Hawke, to abolish the Board because he thought they were too political. Donald Horne who was then the Chair [of the Australia Council] managed to...establish the Community Cultural Development Committee...in 1987 and then it became a Board again in the early 90s.

People attracted to the community arts sector

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are by their nature questioning kinds of people...some...are subversive...

many...conservative middle class people...some...driven by very deep political and philosophical commitments.

ART AND CULTURE

Virtuosity

Technology has allowed affordable access to cultural engagement with new media such as zines and blogging. This new media is doing what community arts has always done, namely connecting the artist with the audience, engaging the audience as participant and collaborator in creative expression. Postmodernism has eroded standards in favour of a bland relativism. The community cultural development sector hasn’t always tackled that issue of virtuosity and quality...in community arts or community cultural development...When working with an artist of a very high standard your capacity for creativity and self expression is...enhanced as an amateur. Some parts of the sector have defined and rigorously applied standards of excellence; they are just different from mainstream standards. Jon Hawkes argues that the triple bottom line reduces all policy and planning to financial or economic impacts and imperatives. He calls for recognition of culture to not be reduced to a sub-set of social policy.\(^{56}\)

Many local councils tag on a cultural aspect to the mandated Social Plan. However Deborah believes that

culture transcends social...Until ‘culture’ is mandated [it] will not have its proper status or recognition. The Regional Arts Development model in NSW has been very successful...in creating awareness of what’s possible.

Communities are not at the point where they can spontaneously rise up and drive art and cultural development. A restriction of access to resources as well as lack of confidence may restrict creative expression.

CCD Bureaucracy

Gay Hawkins demonstrated that community arts, and later community cultural development were bureaucratic inventions.57 The same could be said for the RADO (Regional Arts Development Office) program, where the community has not driven cultural development. Community cultural development has its own life in the real world, even though it is bureaucratic invention. However, the sector has had an unhealthy reliance on the Australia Council bureaucracy to organise and coordinate the practice. This has had the effect of limiting the independence of the sector and their capacity to organise and lobby effectively. Regional Arts Australia developed a close working relationship with the Federal Minister for the Arts during John Howard’s incumbency. Not even the National Arts and Cultural Alliance (NACA) which was formed in response to the latest attempt to rid community arts from the Australia Council, had met with the Minister (at the time of interview).

Art and Values

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There are distinct class and race divisions in Australia, although Australians still value egalitarianism...as an essential part of being Australian. Creativity like everything else in our lives...has become commodified. Culture is consumed rather than participation or creative experience being encouraged. Buying a painting or attending a public performance while forms of participation, may not necessarily release personal creativity. Donald Horne advised that the ruling classes were not going to the Opera and the Ballet but at home reading Harold Robbins. There has been little recognition [for]...the virtuosity that might exist in other cultures due to the argument over values, where the élite dictate what is great Art. Community cultural development practice challenges the assumption that there is one national identity.

There are many identities that make up a nation, and as an individual you can belong to many different communities.

The political debate about Australian traditional values has been divisive, marginalising minority groups. Regional Arts NSW has undergone a huge transformation since the 1980s with the dismantling of the cultural élite, who traditionally ran the Arts Councils. There has progressively been more involvement of communities in the development of their own cultural resources and...expression. As a colony, the arts in Australia were seen as a way of establishing and maintaining class distinction...consciously and deliberately manufactured as an élite activity. In the 19th century, the arts were approached as functional, viewed as having a civilising influence. Museums for instance, were treated as educational and worthier than the circus, side-show alleys and vaudeville. People’s expectations...values and attitudes to the arts have been strongly influenced by this hierarchy. The rise of choirs in the last ten years throughout metropolitan and rural regional Australia demonstrates how people want to express their creativity through music.
I’m a member of a choir instigated by the local Community College... there are fifty members...very few of us have a classical or formal musical education. What motivates us is that we want to sing, and we get an enormous amount of pleasure in singing together...We’re now in our 4th year and we’re getting more confident and...performing in public.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT CULTURAL PLANNING

Social, Cultural, Environmental and Economic Pillars

Deborah wrote the Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government (2004). She believes that all aspects of local government planning have a cultural impact. Although local councils are not required to undertake cultural planning, many local councils in NSW undertake the process with the initiative often coming from an Officer, and occasionally from elected representatives. In Australia, cultural planning and policy development is not accorded the value that European countries place on cultural development as critical to nation building and civilised life. The Local Government and Shires Association economic paper on Local Government drew a distinction between maximalist and minimalist Councils. Conservative elements viewed a minimalist approach as concentrating on roads, rates and rubbish; whereas the maximalist orientation perceived councils’ role to include planning for social, cultural and environmental sustainability. Federal and state authorities have increasingly shifted costs to local government, expecting an increase in responsibility without providing adequate resources to support a commensurate growth in infrastructure. The revised Local Government Act of the 1990s required local government to develop an Asset Management Plan that highlighted how difficult it is for many councils to find the money to maintain their asset base.

Many of the senior managers in local government in NSW come from technical i.e. engineering or accounting backgrounds, rather than social...cultural...experience. Cultural workers in local government are generally so far down in the food chain that their capacity to influence policy and behaviour is...constrained. Exceptions to the proliferation of bureaucratically oriented managers in local government include the new General Manager for the City of Sydney who has a cultural development background; the General Manager of Brisbane City Council who has a social science background, and a former Maitland Council General Manager (later becoming General Manager of a Council in Sydney) who was a librarian. Anne Dunn, who has a community and cultural development background and is now Consultant to the Australia Council, was the General Manager at the City of Philip formerly known as St Kilda. Peoples’ consciousness is evolving through initiatives like Agenda 21 that arose out of world summits on the environment. These summits provide guidelines to local government regarding ecological sustainability, and the interrelationship between economic, environment and social development. There is now an international agenda for culture and local government. This initiative came out of recognition that first world economic growth was at the expense of third world rural, agrarian and feudal systems sustaining this inequity. These countries were concerned about the connection between economic development, social equity and ecological sustainability.

Parramatta City Council Cultural Planning

Parramatta is designated as one of the seven Regional capitals of Sydney in the Metro Plan. Deborah was asked by Parramatta Council’s elected representatives to assist with a proposed Art

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Gallery. A defining and unusual characteristic of the planning process was the way Council Officers and elected representatives worked together in deciding to build an Art Gallery. Separate subsidised Artists Studios were also devised as part of the overall cultural development strategy, where the aim was to nurture the creative abilities of artists and of the wider community. Council staff also viewed new media as a bridge between élite art and the specific vernacular culture of Parramatta. Extensive community consultation in the development of Parramatta 2025, their future vision for the City was undertaken, which looked at economic, social, environmental, and now cultural development for the city. A Jury System representing a cross section of the community, was instigated which tested policy ideas.

Deborah selected people who knew a lot about planning for cultural facilities for the cultural planning process. This group included Pauline Peel, the Brisbane City Council officer responsible for the planning and development of the Powerhouse Performing Arts Centre in Brisbane; Susan Conroy, instrumental in the development of the Casula Powerhouse; John Montgomery who is a land use planner and economist, and Ross Gibson UTS Professor of New Media. One of the aims of the cultural planning process was to stop the brain drain out of Parramatta to Newtown and Marrickville, where Parramatta is generally viewed as the second city of Sydney. Deborah outlined the outcomes of this cultural planning process, in an article she wrote for the Museums and Galleries Foundation.61

A follow up interview was arranged 23 February 2008, where the following adjustments were made to the original Pro Forma Interpretive Summary in collaboration with Deborah:

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Pro Forma Interpretive Summary

Community Arts

Artists apply technical skills that allow audience to participate in a process of community building, where the familiar is seen in a new light.

Community arts allow opportunity to develop high standards of creative ability.

Communities do not have the capacity to drive art and cultural development because of limited resources.

CCD Evaluation

There is no single definition or form of CCD practice, as there is room for a wide range of practice: Some forms of practice focus on building community and the creative processes, and is evaluated by the capacity to build bridges between different groups in the community. These forms of practice aim to develop new knowledge and new insights between members of a community, and to forge social capital. Other projects are motivated by desire to create artworks which profoundly move participants and audience, leading to new understandings and insights about the lived experience. For these projects to be effective, high standards of excellence must be defined and achieved. In both kinds of practice that is community building and art making, standards of excellence need to be defined and achieved. The sector needs to be invigorated by dialogue and debate including the honesty to criticise each other’s work.

Social Significance of Art
Community cultural development applied in personal or social creativity, can be evaluated by standards of virtuosity, where the art is valued in how it is able to move, transform and/or connect.

**Art and Culture Policy**

Evaluation of CCD projects needs to incorporate a clearer explanation of the relationship between the artist practitioner and communities, where the definition of art is broadened to incorporate community cultural creativity.

**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Community cultural development
- Cultural policy
- Local government cultural development management
- Community art and social capital
- Community art skills development
- Art broadened as culture
- Evaluating virtuosity
- Community Arts a bureaucratic construct
- Cultural identity
- Art as social change
- Cultural diversity
- Mandated cultural policy
2.3.3 Michael: Arts NSW Cultural Development Program Manager

Michael’s role is in state cultural development in Metropolitan Sydney with a focus on country NSW. As Program Manager Museums and Capital Infrastructure, City of the Arts and Community Cultural Development (CCD), Michael is responsible for providing information and advice on the development of cultural facilities in NSW. His role is in relation to capital and museums programs that comprise all art forms and facilities, such as arts centres, galleries, museums, theatres and artist’s studios, including projects in Parramatta, Willoughby and Erskineville.

Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Community Cultural Development

‘Community’ in the arts has numerous connotations; a group of artists, an arts organisation, a group with specific cultural needs such as youth, elderly citizens, people with disabilities or from new and emerging ethnic communities. While Arts NSW aims to integrate cultural planning into community development, it cannot be too proscriptive; people cannot be forced into being involved in the arts. It’s a matter of choice. Historically, community arts in the 1970s, was about working directly with the community. This evolved into a more complex notion of community cultural development practice in the 80’s, driven by the Australia Council and the State arts authorities. The objective here was to enable community to develop their own projects. Commonwealth government is now transforming the sector to community partnerships. To a remarkable degree, local government now promotes CCD and community partnerships as a matter of course. Is there a need for State arts agencies to be directly involved in funding CCD
projects? An alternative model may be to have a less direct relationship with practicing CCD individuals and organisations, and place greater emphasis on a general relationship with local government. The emerging Community Partnerships government strategy is a debate that is evolving and will continue to influence cultural development over the next 3-5 years. Regional Arts Australia, the Australia Council and State arts authorities are working together on changes occurring in community and cultural development. All levels of government *have to respond to the arts industry, and at the same time provide leadership and incentive for growth and change. There’s a very high level of cooperation between all levels of government* supporting the arts.

**Regional Arts NSW**

The map of the NSW RADO

regions^62^ represents groups of councils that have agreed to work together to establish a Regional Arts Board and to co-fund with Arts NSW, the employment of a regional arts development officer (RADO).

The NSW regions not represented by a Regional Arts Board include Griffith, Narrandera, Leeton as well as the Lower Hunter, Central Coast and Illawarra. Through Regional Arts NSW the boards comprise a national coalition of community cultural development service providers under Regional Arts Australia. Arts NSW provides some funding to Regional Arts NSW, which acts as a secretariat for the boards. Arguably, NSW has the best regional cultural structure. Victoria is developing a similar network. Regional centres which develop cultural infrastructure and services can benefit and influence surrounding and neighboring regions. Hopefully the Dubbo City Council’s Western Plains Cultural Centre will *influence attitudes and plans for cultural development in Griffith, Parkes, Grenfell and other towns in the Mid West*. While the funding is

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^62^ See Figure 3, NSW Regional Arts Boards
important, the individuals and project champions who take a leadership role bring about change, in some cases against a resistant council.

**Metropolitan Sydney**

A regional arts board and associated regional arts development officer model has yet to prove effective

*in metropolitan Sydney, partly because the majority of country councils do not have the financial resources to employ full time cultural staff, or to drive their own agenda for cultural development on their own.*

Cultural development in country NSW is largely predicated on cooperation and collaboration. Sydney has forty-six local governments, and *about half of them have cultural programs.* Although many metropolitan councils do not have purpose built museums, galleries and theatres, there are alternative clubs and arts networks, as well as access to major facilities in other council areas or the CBD. At the same time, some councils have established, or are planning major cultural facilities: *Willoughby Council is about to spend over $100 million on a new Civic and Cultural Centre.* Campbelltown, Liverpool, Penrith and Parramatta have *some marvelous culture resources and some of the most innovative new libraries are in metropolitan Sydney.* The reason that there are no cultural facilities or programs in metropolitan Sydney may be due to ratepayers who have not identified cultural development as a need. Ratepayers may feel they have access to the arts, *to the numerous resources in terms of cultural institutions...arts organisations...artists in the city and its surrounding suburbs.*
National Cultural Policy

Michael agrees with David Throsby, Chair of the NSW Arts Advisory Council, that Australia should develop a national cultural policy.\(^6\) However the process needs to have an established broad consensus that reflects community aspirations. A defacto national cultural planning process has been evolving since the establishment of the Australia Council and the Cultural Minister’s Council. It works well but is an area Australians are either not aware of, or take for granted. Government language about arts and cultural development changes and evolves decade by decade. For instance CCD and multiculturalism gained traction in the 1980s with governments, triggering significant growth and support. The 1988 bicentenary was primarily a celebration of community cultural development and a multicultural festival. Times change and other policies and strategies have taken over. All levels of government are now more strategic about cultural planning, with NSW drafting and implementing a well defined State Plan.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Cultural Planning

Arts NSW encourages cultural development as part of the mandatory social and community planning process for the 151 local councils across NSW. The aim of the Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government (July 2004)\(^6\) is to enable culture and arts development to become part of the social and community planning process. At the time of interview, Arts NSW had received cultural plans from 63 councils. Local government varies in the level of cultural services provided for their communities, with proactive councils being responsive to community expectations. A generational change has occurred over the past 15 years in local government

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practice; from a defensive to a responsive concern for community aspirations regarding the arts and cultural expression. There is also a growing trend to manage cultural development under local government community and social service structures. Some councils are employing full time community cultural development (CCD) officers, youth arts development officers and professionally qualified staff to manage galleries, museums and theatres. This enhances the capacity of councils to negotiate advice, support and funding from other sources and from state and local government.

**Funding Programs**

Arts NSW works with client local councils principally, with provision of incentive funding for cultural infrastructure, arts projects and activities. Arts NSW provides funding to 151 local governments for their libraries. In addition, from a third to half the number of the state’s local governments receive varying amounts of funding for a variety of cultural projects. Although libraries are independent of Arts NSW, they are a key cultural resource, which can have a direct bearing on community attitudes to the arts and culture. Libraries are influential because they collect and document local family, social and community history. State government assistance to local government can supplement council revenue, and constitutes a significant factor in the development of arts projects. Councils that have undertaken cultural plans, *have gradually made substantial investment in the arts* in the services provided to the local community. This infrastructure includes *libraries, museums, galleries, public halls, community arts facilities, neighborhood centres, youth centres*. Recent Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates a *quantum increase in the level of expenditure from all levels of government in the cultural sector right across Australia*. Professional artists and professional artworkers have become adept at sourcing federal and state funding. This is in contrast to smaller remote regions where volunteers with
limited resources tend to drive community arts projects. Local government initiates cultural
development with funding applications to Arts NSW for particular cultural projects. Up to a
thousand applications are received each year by Arts NSW for grants, fellowships and awards.
To a certain extent, the grants process can be a form of cultural mapping and scoping, giving an
overview of projects and plans. The grants process provides a platform to build long term
relationships with certain local governments. Professional peer groups assess applications as they
relate to theatre, music, visual arts and craft, literature and history. As Arts NSW major clients
rarely obtain all the funding they need from one source, co-funding with other agencies may be
brokered for single projects. As a general rule, a funding body such as Arts NSW encourages
applicants to find matching grants from other funding authorities. Anne Dunn’s *National
Directions: Regional Arts 2006*\(^65\) report to Regional Arts Australia, provides an excellent
overview of cultural mapping and planning in country Australia. This kind of research provides
planning strategies to government funding authorities.

**Creative Industries**

Arts NSW program managers endeavor to encourage local councils to work collectively to share
resources. The aim of these partnerships is that sharing resources will develop cultural enterprises
such as galleries, museums and/or festivals and cultural tourism. Tourism has now been
incorporated into DSRD (Department State and Regional Development): NSW Film and the
Television Office has been integrated into Tourism and State and Regional Development.

Richard Florida’s ideas\(^66\) have had a populist impact on Australian cultural planning. There has
been recognition that regional skill diversity, professional resources, cultural facilities as well as


communications and information technology, contribute to a growing strong economy. The arts are integral to life long learning and well being. However, there are equal arguments for arts and cultural development best practice, professional standards and excellence. Arts Northern Rivers has received Arts NSW funding to draft a Creative Industries Strategy for north east NSW, which may create a model for other regions experiencing rapid change and growth. Alternatively, cultural planning and creative industry strategies can benefit regional centres with declining populations such as Broken Hill, or those experiencing profound change such as Newcastle and Wollongong. Their respective local governments have long term tourism and creative industry strategies, aimed at counteracting the radical economic changes that have occurred in these areas over the past twenty five years.

**Pro Forma Interpretive Summary**

In Arts NSW role as a funding body, the aim is to support local government as cultural manager, rather than driving a cultural agenda.

Government funding is not responsible for community cultural development. Although resisted by their local councils, the drive and persistence of individuals who take on cultural leadership roles, drives cultural initiatives.

Cultural development in Metropolitan and Regional NSW depends on ratepayers identifying cultural gaps, which are then articulated in funding submissions to government authorities such as Arts NSW.
Reports commissioned by federal and state arts authorities inform national cultural planning strategies across the levels of government that share funding responsibilities for cultural development.

**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Art broadened as culture
- Local government cultural management role
- Regional and metropolitan arts
- Ratepayers
- Mandated social community planning: Voluntary cultural plans
- Community driven cultural development
- Funding shapes cultural development
- Regional Arts NSW successful model of cultural development
- National cultural policy
- Creative Industries: Partnerships share resources

**2.3.4 Hannah: Arts OutWest RADO**

Hannah is the Bathurst based Arts OutWest Executive Officer, also sometimes referred to as the Regional Arts Development Officer. She is assisted by a full time Communications Officer and a casual Finance Officer. Arts OutWest is a not-for-profit incorporated association, managed by a Regional Arts Board responsible for the 3 yearly Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan outlines *the operational plans and the main priorities for the organisation*. The Regional Arts Board is comprised of sixteen (current 2008) Directors representing a wide range of interests and the local governments across the Central West. Arts OutWest aims to promote, facilitate, educate, assist
and advocate for arts and cultural development in the Central West. The organisation also aims to improve individual artists and cultural groups’ ability to plan, organise and publicise events. Hannah advises individuals and groups with the aim of building capacity and skills.

Hannah recommends arts and cultural programs to the Board. *This year our priority* [is a] *youth arts program capitalising on the Biennial ArtStart program funded by TAFE NSW.* This also presented an opportunity to apply for other funding that *helped to develop the new biennial Catapult Youth Arts Festival in Bathurst.*

**Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics**

**Community Cultural Development Funding**

Arts NSW funds Regional Arts NSW, the peak body for the network of thirteen Regional Arts Boards that includes Arts OutWest. Local Governments also *fund virtually half of the core programs* run by Arts OutWest. The larger Councils *do see their role as subsidising an aspect of the* smaller communities’ cultural development. Hannah aims to assist those *that have got the least ability to project a voice for themselves,* such as the Parkes Craft Corner where the arts and craft would not be in the regional gallery but *it’s the place that everybody knows...always open...always someone friendly in there...it’s accessible.* Australian professional concert singer Dorothy Helmrich founded local voluntary arts councils in the 1940s. Helmrich promoted professional touring companies to the regions that provided *social-cultural* [and] *well being for their communities.* Local arts councils carry on this legacy in that
these people are part and parcel of their communities...There sometimes are barriers...usually based on personalities as is the situation in many volunteer organisations.

Hannah encourages people to join their local arts councils. These local groups assist in developing community arts projects or presenting performing arts programs and exhibitions. Arts OutWest also recommends Country Arts Support Program (CASP) grants to Arts Councils and other community organisations across the region. CASP is administered by Regional Arts NSW. For example CASP money assisted an after school drama workshop for children in Corinella, a small community in Forbes shire. Hannah’s experience working in the Sydney Northern Beaches was that politically correct policies disadvantage those not in privileged minority groups. Community arts groups there did not receive government funding because we were seen to be in a well heeled...élite area. However in the élite arts, recognised names and institutions are more likely to be funded. No regional arts program within all of NSW had received funding from the Australia Council administering Community Cultural Development grants

in spite of applications including ours...very disappointing...Funding is not there for individuals, unless you’re a practicing professional artist...need to be auspiced.

At the time of interview, the Australia Council Community Cultural Development Board was being restructured as Community Partnerships so that

CCD outcomes can be achieved [by] developing partnerships and attracting other non-arts monies...makes it possible for arts and cultural outcomes to be regionally relevant.
Hannah has been promoting a Creative Industries program for the past two years that has yet to be articulated on paper and has yet to get the funding but will have a strong training and professional development component. The Central West has a burgeoning, brilliantly active set of communities and Hannah believes that the existing talent in the region can be developed with encouragement and opportunities being made available. Arts OutWest provides organisations with identified artistic resources and will pay professionals to deliver skills training. There is a pool of practicing artists who teach. Hannah cites a locally based Indonesian born...classical dancer who...came as a Refugee to West Australia...got into the Australian Centre for Performing Arts contemporary dance; went to Melbourne, formed a dance group and has contributed to fringe and other festivals in the region.

Art and Social Health

Hannah assists with funding applications from groups who may not be arts organisations but will deliver arts based activities. Musical and dramatic societies have become very strong in the region. Local dramatic and musical societies deliver the artistic and performing health back into the community. These societies also have their own audiences because people are loyal to their locals. Performing groups in Bathurst include the Carillon Musical Society and the Bathurst Theatre Company; Oberon has Wild Oats, which is an arm of the arts council. Funding is not an issue because they’ve got their audiences there and they’re all volunteers not relying on an income. Local theatre and musical societies provide an avenue...to socialise...to have meaning outside of other things in their lives.

Cultural Identity
Cultural development informs individual and community identity. Hannah views a major obstruction in her community cultural development role with rural people’s limited view of the arts. She sees her role as being an agent of cultural change when broadening people’s understanding of art and culture, by demonstrating that listening to the radio, going to the cinema and watching movies is *consuming an arts or creative product*. She encourages people to *get involved in something in which they wouldn’t otherwise...and then you’re starting to talk about a community*. Hannah defines ‘community’ as any number of people who have got a common set of values, activities, reason to be doing something together and this group defines itself, rather than being labeled by people outside the group.

**Pro Forma Interpretive Summary**

The Regional Arts network grew out of Dorothy Helmrich’s ability to provide arts and cultural opportunities to disadvantaged regional and remote communities.

Arts OutWest aims to build community capacity in arts and cultural project management training and skills development.

Building constructive relationships with local councils is requisite to realising community arts and cultural development outcomes.

Self funded community arts projects are sustained by volunteers and loyal local audiences.

Non-arts organisations delivering arts based activities aim for social, health and educational outcomes.
Agents of cultural change broaden people’s understanding of art and culture, by demonstrating that everyday activities encompass consuming arts or creative products.

A Creative Industries model advocates economic value for creative output, in the development of artists’ skills that will attract paying audiences.

**Inducted Analysis Summary**

- Funding shapes cultural development
- Regional Arts NSW successful model of cultural development
- Community driven art and cultural development
- Skills development
- Art broadened as culture
- Local government community cultural management role
- Creative Industries

**2.3.5 Bruce: Local Government General Manager**

Bruce is the Oberon Council General Manager. His role is *to work with the community* to provide amenities aimed at *quality of life* for residents and visitors, *not otherwise provided by private enterprise*. Oberon is a cool climate town at an altitude of 3500 feet. The local government north boundary is at Fish River near Tarana; west to Burraga and Mt David; south at Abercrombie Upper Lachlan border and to the east as far as Duckmaloi River. Oberon Council recently amalgamated 17% of the Evans Shire, incorporating *the small villages of Burraga and Mt David*. This amalgamation added an extra hundred people to the locality. The rest of the
Evans shire was amalgamated by Bathurst Regional Council. Bruce came to Oberon thirteen years ago when the town was centred on farming pursuits, mostly sheep and cattle and also the softwood timber industry. The factories associated with the softwood industry employ over 750 people, that for a small country town is a major plus. Bruce was instrumental reviving the Oberon Business Association. He became secretary for twelve months to help them go through the process of getting...established and registered as an incorporated body, and all of those things that they didn’t have an understanding about how to do...A new resident to Oberon is now President...Fresh blood has come in and now they’re looking at different things...People sit back and watch and wait in small country towns, where new people need to prove they are genuine before being accepted into the community.

Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Local Government Cultural Services

Oberon Council’s priorities are roads, sewage and water, as well as providing cultural venues including playing fields [and] auditoriums where the community can put on plays and musicals. The library also caters for artistic needs. The Community Technology Centre (CTC) is a voluntarily run organisation that provides older people with training in technology, as well as being a place for social interaction. It is not in great demand and it certainly took a while for people to get to know it’s there. The Visitor Information and the Central West Community College are tenants in the building, with a separate room being available for hire or training purposes, furbished with government funded computers. Although the Social and Community Plan has identified community interest in a multi purpose hall, Council doesn’t actually believe that there’s a great need for it...what’s the income stream to generate from it to continue to pay for it? The local RSL is viewed as providing adequate community facilities in that it costs you
nothing...don’t have to hire, they just provide it, and they make money out of selling drinks and food. Another facility that could potentially be a community facility, is the recently built pavilion which seats around 300 people. The showground is privately run by a group of trustees who built the pavilion with a $50,000 government Centenary grant matched by the Council. Oberon Council would like to be the trustees of the showground but the private trustee won’t agree to it. Oberon Council also pays a contribution to Regional Arts NSW Arts OutWest. Council contributes financially to the regional arts government funded organisation because of the promotional activity Arts OutWest provides to support the Oberon Arts Council. Council assists the Oberon Arts Council in their cultural activities, such as events celebrating the Centenary of the Council. The Arts Council is also putting together a mosaic in the Common...but it’s been driven by the community, not the Council. The annual Kowmung Music Festival caters for a small interest group, and although Council has given assistance over the years, support was reduced due to negative comments made in the media by members of the group.

**Cultural Heritage**

Cultural development is up to the community

> where they have a special interest and a desire to do something, we can provide assistance to help them go through that process...There’s always a small nucleus of people who have a strong interest in things and they’re often the quiet achievers that you don’t notice.

The community drives areas of cultural interest, and individuals initiate projects volunteering their time and donating their own resources. Local man Barry Webb initiated the preservation of isolated cemetery sites and
developing garden beds up around the museum which was the old railway station...He’s got a huge black and white film collection of things all around Oberon...wonderful asset...an historic collection of the area as it was, streetscapes...those sort of photographs are invaluable...Marj Armstrong a former Mayor of the Council...and...a local businesswoman organised getting graves in the cemeteries properly marked with a plaque...because...headstones have worn away over the years and they wanted to do research...all been done voluntarily...she’s mobilised a sub-committee around her and the Council’s supporting that group.

History is an important aspect of local identity, and preservation of heritage sites is an initiative coming from the community in that they feel that there’s a need. When you look back at Oberon’s history, it was certainly a backwater. It was a cold inhospitable climate. A lot of people that came into this area...back in the early 1800s were convicts that had escaped...Before the Waragamba Dam...there was a traveling stock route through the Baragarang Valley, or they came up from Goulburn...before the Blue Mountains pass had been opened up.

Many people arrived in the area up the back way and started farming...peasants...Irish, the Welsh...A few of them were outlaws and prisoners trying to hide away from the law. The main routes went to Bathurst and Lithgow but did not go through the Oberon area. Council has appointed a Heritage Officer who is listing significant sites including the first crossing of the Blue Mountains that goes through O’Connell. The original route from Bathurst to Sydney was the
coal wood road that ran through O’Connell, until they built the Great Western Highway, which then moved things away. The Heritage Officer is also documenting pisé (wattle and daub) buildings in the area. Malachi Hall in the main street of Oberon is also a site of historical importance.

Tourism

Tourism is expected to expand the local economy, away from an over reliance on the softwood industry. Oberon Council is promoting the region as a destination where people can live and enjoy the country lifestyle, in close proximity to Sydney.

There is a lot of beauty here that’s been largely untouched and undeveloped that is natural...native wildlife, clean rivers, trout fishing...4 wheel driving...push bikes, walking tracks... More than 52% of our local area is unrated...because it’s national parks or state forest pine plantations.

The Commonwealth is funding a heritage railway line from Oberon to Hazelgrove with a walking and riding track in the rail corridor, which provides a safe bike-riding track. Oberon Council recently received $100,000 ATDP tourism funding towards the development of the walking/riding track and the heritage line. Council has applied for further funding of half a million dollars.
to develop the Abercrombie road link down to Goulburn and to Oberon as Stage 1 of the Tablelands Ways, which is an alternate route away from...Sydney to take people from the south coast...Melbourne, Canberra...through Oberon...Lithgow, out to Mudgee and then up to the Hunter.

Oberon took the initiative in this project and approached the Upper Lachlan and Goulburn Councils to organise a representation to the NSW Minister for Roads to fix up a road network infrastructure that was not likely to happen without some special funding. The Central West regional councils (CENTROC) are lobbying to redevelop the Bells Line of Road from Lithgow to Sydney, which is expected to minimise travel time between Sydney and the region. CENTROC also identified the safety concerns of the trucking industry for a divided highway, rather than just emphasising reduction in travel time.

Cultural Planning

Oberon recently completed its compulsory five yearly Social and Community Plan. It is mandatory that community members who are consulted in this process include minority groups such as Aboriginal; those from a non-English speaking background; youth; women; men and the elderly. There is an option to develop a cultural plan incorporating crime prevention, that links in with the Social and Community planning phase. However Oberon has not undertaken a cultural plan, which is a question of how much interest is within your community to get involved. Oberon with a population of over 3000, is a small country town that cannot provide cultural services such as theatres and galleries that major regional cities Bathurst, Orange and Dubbo have built. Grants are an important source of funding services to the community. Council is allocated a set amount of Commonwealth funds administered by the State, which over time has diminished.
Local councils represent local issues and concerns, while state and federal governments are viewed as being removed and not in touch with local communities. Applying for state and federal grants in realising local community needs, requires developing a rapport with those in lower government positions and working these relationships until you get up the top, because if you don’t go from the bottom up...you’re going to find obstructions in the middle. Local cultural planning concentrates on facilities that have multiple uses which Council can afford, and that the community can contribute towards.

Aged Care

One of the major gaps identified in the Social and Community Plan is in aged care. Oberon does not have a nursing home and local elderly people have to leave town...where they can get a bed, if you can get a bed. The problem is between the federal and state governments, where the Commonwealth is responsible for providing beds and the State is required to provide infrastructure. There is a groundswell of public opinion about doing something about this. The issues to be resolved include finding suitable land, determining the funding agency, and management of a proposed facility.

Pro Forma Interpretive Summary

Cultural identity is closely associated with pride felt by the local community in early settlers’ ability to survive harsh conditions, ensuring prosperity for future generations.

If new residents are able to overcome initial resistance, there is potential to augment the established local community skill base.
Local councils are in a grassroots strategic position to understand and address community needs; whereas state and federal government policy and planning is removed and out of touch.

Unlike private enterprise, local councils provide services not aimed at generating a profit.

Oberon Council financially supports the Regional Arts NSW Arts OutWest organisation because of its role promoting local community cultural activities.

**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Local economy
- Local government convergence
- Local cultural identity
- Local government role managing economic and social cultural development
- Community driven cultural development
- Local government community cultural development role
- Mandatory social community planning: Voluntary cultural planning
- Developing key funding contacts
- Funding shapes cultural development

**2.3.6 Lesley: Local Government Community Cultural Development Director**

Lesley is responsible for Bathurst Regional Council Social/Community as well as Cultural planning. Bathurst Regional Council incorporated part of Evans Shire in a regional restructure. At the time of interview, Lesley was developing a newly created position from this
amalgamation, coordinating the existing cultural services team which is an area traditionally seen as peripheral to local governments’ core function. Prior to the creation of Lesley’s position, there were three Directors with separate cultural planning responsibilities. The advantage of working with the team leaders is their experience of Council’s cultural service provision. The team acts like a steering or advisory committee in that the cultural team as the shapers and the guiders develop the Cultural Plan with the community. Lesley relies on the team leaders because of their knowledge of local key players and drivers. However, she is not restricted by the team leaders’ individual vision for their own facility, rather seeing her role as addressing the overall Bathurst cultural scene. Lesley also views her role as assisting joint planning with the various Council departments in relation to managing Bathurst cultural facilities, which comprise the Entertainment Centre; Ben Chifley home and Fossil Museum; Libraries; the Art Gallery and the Cottage. She aspires to bringing people together as the important aspect of her cultural planning role. Her focus is on the community cultural planning process, and implementing the Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government (2004).67

Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Bathurst Community Cultural Planning

Lesley’s focus is on the community cultural planning process and implementing the Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government (2004). She aspires to bring people together as the important aspect of her cultural planning role. Where galleries and museums are generally only accessible to professional artists, Lesley views community art as allowing people to develop creative capacity. The local community perceives Council as delaying provision of cultural

services. Although Council has applied for funding in the past, this has not translated into employing cultural services staff.

Lesley’s prior employment was in social planning, where cultural programs were designed to fit specific local social problems such as graffiti art programs involving young people who were vandalising property. Social/Community planning is a separate process to cultural planning in Bathurst because you’ve got key groups here that are quite articulate and who disagree with each other, competing for limited dollars, space and attention. Council favors funding local groups that attempt to converge and work together. Bathurst Council has a Management Plan and its history in the past 10 to 15 years has been assisting cultural providers develop financial and structural independence. Bathurst’s population is changing with an influx of professional retirees from Sydney who are aware of infrastructure that they would like to have from a cultural perspective.

Bathurst Regional Council ethos underpins a belief that the local community should drive cultural initiatives, which has allowed key individuals and groups who know how to lobby the councilors...and get what they want. However Lesley views cultural planning as a process that addresses the views and concerns of those who are less adept at being heard.

Local government can become distracted by particular councilors’ dominating views, rather than representing the common good, which can be the most irritating thing about local government.

NSW Cultural Policy Administration

Legislation in 1999 enacted compulsory Local Government Social/Community planning. Before becoming mandatory, the emphasis had been on
roads, rates and rubbish...State and federal funding is now being made available for local
governments who have got a Cultural Plan in place

which demonstrates that local government is committed to long term strategic cultural planning. Local Government cultural planning is administered by the state department, which does not stipulate cultural activities eligible for federal and state funding. Instead the state department encourages councils to work with the local community to define their own cultural needs and aspirations.

The Local Government and Shires Association (LGSA) is just a peak lobbying body that pushed the cultural planning guidelines to the Department of Local Government. The Department of Local Government funded a LGSA Cultural Officer to work with councils across the state to take on the role of cultural planning. There is a three-year Cultural Accord between the Department of Local Government and the LGSA that provided for funding the LGSA Cultural Officer position. The LGSA tends to be a political entity and the Cultural Officer position was a difficult one. The Cultural Accord has changed for this three year triennium...focusing on...convergence where cultural groups such as libraries, museums and gallery and archives work more closely together. It's a definite change in the way that they’re viewing the cultural scene.

Funding

Lesley’s department provides financial support and infrastructure to otherwise independently run community groups such as the Historical Society and the Kelso Community Centre. If councils are not interested in the cultural planning process, they would most likely not be interested in the

68 See 2.3.10 Jill: Community Educator, who was Manager of the Kelso Community Centre at the time of interview.

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funding available from the federal and state bodies for cultural projects in their region. Applications must be made annually, even when grants are typically three years for a particular project. It is rare to receive funding that is not tied to a variety of different categories. Lesley prefers to develop projects identified by the local community. People become resentful when cultural programs fit funding criteria because you end up shaping a program to fit whatever grant monies are available. The option would be to have grants available which are untied. Grant applications would be more successful if addressing those cultural areas for groups that have not had any opportunity to work together because they’re just so busy in their own spaces. These groups tend not to be well resourced, and are working within limits to create some really good events or product.

Art and Culture

Prior to the current planning process, Bathurst’s cultural agenda concentrated primarily on the visual arts. Lesley believes that art is not synonymous with culture, in that a cultural policy is responsive to all of the cultural industry and not just the visual arts. The community defines ‘Culture’, rather than people being dictated to in relation to what culture is in terms of performance, dance or other art forms. Culture in Bathurst also incorporates car racing which is a really strong component of this place. It drives a whole lot of different events and activities. With the new Labour state government restructure under Iemma’s leadership, art has lost its distinct status, bundled in with other portfolios. The Bathurst Arts Council is an independent body which needs to be nurtured in its voluntary capacity rather than layering local government on top of it, which would squash it.

Creative Industries
Cultural productivity and industry has become a driving agenda for the Labour state government. Emphasis is now on your statistics...attendances as in how many dollars is it bringing into the city. The final product has become more important than the process, and Lesley believes that engaging in a cultural activity for its own sake is really important.

Community Arts

Council has instigated reference forums with Aboriginal and linguistically diverse groups that assist in information dissemination. The newly created Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre (BMEC) Animateur position (see 2.3.15 Margie: Theatre-maker/Community Performance Development) is a funded collaboration between Arts NSW, the Australia Council and Bathurst City Council. BMEC Manager Stephen Champion administers the Animateur position, and Lesley oversees BMEC. The aim of the Animateur position is to crosshatch performance arts ideas across the various local community groups. The position is a very new idea, a new way of working, with another 3 projects being trialed across the state. The Australia Council has shifted from Community Cultural Development to audience development and marketing: Creating the Animateur position is to cover them feeling guilty about dropping the Community Cultural Development Board. As a consequence, the Australia Council is getting a fair bit of flack...it was such a blatant thing to do with no community consultation, and so Arts NSW is now the key player. The Animateur position is a response to regional entertainment centres not supporting and growing local talent. What they’ve become are venues, rather than places of learning and development. Lesley relies on the community to define areas of cultural significance, which is an important part of the cultural planning process. A community understands its own character that makes it different and special from other localities. Over the past five years, the Bathurst community has articulated that it wants a community arts space for various activities like
needlework, dance, and clay work. Council has acknowledged the community’s views, but asks how will the centre be funded? Although it is likely that external funding will be required to build this community centre, Lesley supports the project because *a strong community fabric* is created where art works. Works that may not be good enough to hang at the Art Gallery are allowed exposure in a safe public space.

**Pro Forma Interpretive Summary**

Local governments proved to be ad hoc in their Social and Community planning before legislation in 1999 made it mandatory. Local Governments are encouraged by statutory funding authorities to commit to long term cultural planning, with funding incentives made available on completion of individual council cultural plans. It is important to address the economic criteria of funding applications, even where the aim of the project is the activity itself.

Statutory funding bodies have cultural planning priorities such as galleries, libraries and museums. However the voluntary cultural planning process is founded on the premise that councils work with their local communities in determining how these specific communities differ in their views and understanding of what ‘culture’ is, and how it is expressed locally.

Cultural planning, which is a voluntary local government initiative, tends to be linked to the Social and Community Plan. However this is not the case in Bathurst due to key individuals and groups being articulate about local cultural needs and aspirations.

Where galleries and museums are generally only accessible to professional artists, community art allows individuals to develop creative capacity.
**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Community driven cultural planning
- Cultural Industries
- Government funding shapes cultural planning

**2.3.7 Jodie: Visual Artist/Community Educator**

Although Jodie views herself as an arts practitioner, she identifies strongly with *being an educator, breaking down the barriers... ignorance and the misconceptions*. Jodie worked in Sydney’s Boomallí Aboriginal Artists Cooperative for nine years. The Australia Council mostly funded Boomallí, and the cooperative curates Indigenous art exhibitions.

**Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics**

Community Artist Educator

Jodie’s involvement with local community groups stems from *wanting to teach people about Aboriginal culture* because

> knowledge is power in Aboriginal culture, and knowledge is power in the western system too... power in Aboriginal culture is based on knowledge.

Jodie was asked by Central West Regional Arts NSW Arts OutWest RADO Hannah Semler to guest curate ‘Movin’ Round,’ an exhibition of Indigenous artists at the Orange Art Gallery. She *didn’t want dots* for this exhibition, which she views as
mass market kitsch art...western culture...taught in the schools by non-Aboriginal people...imposed on our people; the continual denial of our cultural existence.

Aboriginal art in museums is

not culturally appropriate... a lot of our teaching is hands on and interactive...Art, music, dance; it’s part of our culture...When the exhibition [Movin’ Round] was opened in Orange, there was dance and song and music, because it’s part of our culture, it’s all one.

In the 1990s Jodie worked with other Aboriginal artists in Sydney to set up a cultural centre. Bangarra Dance, Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative, Black Books and Black Films emanated from this movement. Boomalli was initiated by a

mob of artists who could not fit within a stereotype and the galleries wouldn’t show their work... Michael Reilly, Fiona Foley, Avril Quayle, Jeffrey Samuels, Brenda Croft [and] Tracey Moffat who eventually resigned: She decided she didn’t want to be put in that box as being an Aboriginal Artist…tokenised...I really related to why she did that... You’ve got to dissect yourself because of the way the system works

in mass producing stereotyped Aboriginal art like dot paintings and Albert Namatjira’s landscapes. I’m tired of stereotyping in Aboriginal Art... We at Boomalli, that’s what we fought against. Many exhibitions at Boomalli were political from an Aboriginal perspective. The artists at Boomalli used black humour, sending up Aboriginal stereotyping with deliberate kitsch exhibitions. Jodie views this as a way of challenging, and where new learning can occur.
Boomalli also attempted to build connections between remote Aboriginal communities and regional art galleries. The state government established a Regional Art Network (RAN) that lasted 12 months, because it was set up to fail. The appointed artist was situated at the Liverpool Casula Powerhouse as a tokenistic gesture. The RAN did not address the issues for which the collective had lobbied. While at Boomalli, Jodie worked with the Board of Studies where she and other artists were consulted on cultural issues for curriculum publications. The Board of Studies

actually had an Aboriginal Unit and they worked with the wider community. If they had to deal with an Aboriginal health issue, they went and talked with the Aboriginal Health Service. It was a really good relationship and those relationships are still...in play.

Cultural Identity

While Jodie was Administrator then General Manager at Boomalli, she graduated with a diploma in Community Organisations at UTS. She

wrote a paper at Uni about development of Aboriginal Art and Culture in NSW and it was to do with the recognition of Aboriginal cultural identity...Aboriginal cultural existence in NSW addressing the stereotype of “you’re not really Aboriginal, you’re only a part Aborigine”...about the whole question of your identity...I struggle with trying to maintain my identity as an Aboriginal person because of what society has imposed on our people.

Jodie grew up in multicultural Liverpool in the 1970s where there was racial warfare at our school. It was mainly between Vietnamese children and those children who identified as
'Aussies,' even though they also came from varied ethnic backgrounds. Jodie’s family lived in government housing where a trial colour coding system housed Aboriginal families next to English migrants. Jodie’s family experienced racism from neighbours who started a petition against her grandmother

\[ \text{saying that we'd bring the value down in their home when they weren’t even home owners,} \]
\[ \text{when they came out on a 10 pound ticket.} \]

Jodie’s mother lived in Redfern, which was multicultural at that time. The Aboriginal people in the ‘50s actually all lived in Alexandria at that stage. It was not until the green bans of the 1970s that Aboriginal people lived in Redfern, when they were given a 99 year lease. Jodie experienced Aboriginal people losing identity in that they

\[ \text{lost their sense of themselves, because of their own pain and suffering; some are victims} \]
\[ \text{and some survivors.} \]

Jodie’s mother was awarded a Federation Award. Her stepfather Kevin Cook has been a major influence. Kevin Cook, a well known activist campaigning for Indigenous rights, was founding Director of Sydney’s Tranby College. He was involved in the Long March Committee that organised the 1988 anti-bicentenary protest. Musicians involved in this protest included Paul Kelly, Midnight Oil and where Yothu Yindi got their first break... A lot of non-Aboriginal people were very actively involved in that protest, which was a reconciliation movement before the government funded Reconciliation Councils. The NSW Premier Nick Greiner reinstated the Summaries Offences Act in 1988, and as a result many Aboriginal people were arrested during
the anti-bicentenary protests. The 1988 protest movement brought people together, a lot of things changed.

Community

Jodie is mainly involved in community-based organisations where she talks to people who advise and counsel her

so we sort of have this connection, it’s really a circle. It’s this big circle, like we all connect up. [It’s] about me being true to myself, and that’s what it’s about. The bigger picture about how I see my role in the whole circle, is that by being true to me... See that’s the whole thing about the circle again, because being true to me means that all these other people around me, I’m being true to them too... I’m true to people around me...that’s part of our culture... and that’s actually law... Aboriginal people adopted that Bible because...the basic ten commandments, a lot of that stuff was in their customs and was in their law...

There were main principles like being greedy, like that’s where that whole thing sharing, it was just expected of you. That’s why there’s no word for ‘thankyou’ in Aboriginal custom...Greed was just something that was scorned upon; you were greedy, you broke the law.

Jodie views herself as teaching the wider community including Aboriginal people who have been institutionalised and sadly lost a lot of our people’s ways... I see my role for those who want to learn [but] there’ll be those you’ll never let into your circle.
At the time of interview Jodie was a CDEP Director and Deputy Chair of the Wellington Indigenous Land Corporation, as well as member of the Wellington Land Council. She has also been involved over a number of years with the local mainstream Wellington Reconciliation group. She proposed a family fun day, and this group organised a March across the Bridge for Reconciliation, to coincide with the second anniversary of the Sydney bridge walk. Jodie applied for funding from the State Reconciliation Group, and the grant was mostly spent on a Reconciliation Quilt. The Reconciliation group is apolitical, being about people coming together to learn together...finally it’s about acceptance. Jodie tries to organise community family events that are free and where the objective is fun. She wants to invite more of the Koori community to join the Wellington Reconciliation group, which is a challenge because the group meets at the Church of England. Jodie is frustrated with those who complain including those in the black community, because it’s about the interest of the whole not just the individual:

I’m trying to teach my kids a sense of empathy for all life and it’s not about them just as an individual, and it’s not just about the Aboriginal community. We live in a community; you be good to everyone and everyone will be good to you. It’s about values.

She is involved in community because there are things I don’t like [and] I want to do something about it. Education is probably the most important key. Jodie views herself as an educator who is a survivor, not a victim. Her attitude is to not wait for governments or councils to develop initiatives, but as Aboriginal community workers to
get up and do it yourself... It’s just such a beautiful thing to work on something together...gives me energy...I love it. It’s a spiritual high. I’ve always been a person that likes to make people happy. I try really hard.

Jodie’s perspective on Aboriginal politics is that we had to work together as a community, and that is what Aboriginal culture is about. She is committed to maintaining cultural identity particularly the value systems. Aboriginal traditional warfare had few fatalities, as it was more about releasing bad energy...it was a spectator thing about healing because bad thoughts bring bad energy.

Violence between Aboriginal groups increased because of dividing and conquering occurring after colonisation. Aboriginal people survived the missions because they maintained their identity through their tribal practices of sharing. Marcia Langton wrote a paper called Medicine Square about Musgrave Park in Brisbane. It was about dealing with bad energy where Aboriginal people were seen in the park drinking and in confrontation; get it all out there and deal with it. Jodie views a democratic system as incongruent with Aboriginal cultural practice. For example the Aboriginal Land Councils operate on majority rules where individuals make decisions on somebody else’s country. This causes trouble between Aboriginal organisations of that particular locality. We see the continuity of white man’s law creating forms of genocide in all different ways. Aboriginal culture is not really a democratic society...not about majority rules, it’s a consensus...finding a harmonious balance in a community...decisions made by the elders and this social structure has been dissolved with colonisation particularly with our men...locked up on Aboriginal reserves, institutionalised, not allowed to hunt. Jodie finds overt racism easier to deal
with than the underlying racism that’s silent with the continuing denial about things in Australian history.

Wellington Wedgetail Eagles Children’s Dance Troop

When the family moved to Wellington from Sydney, they were approached by Aunty Joyce to start the children’s Wellington Wedgetail Dance Troop. Jodie and her husband run workshops and fund the group’s activities. She cites Aboriginal ballerina Roslyn Watson as an inspiration. Jodie’s husband Cedric is an Aboriginal dancer, musician and storyteller. When the family lived in Sydney, Jodie’s husband Cedric worked in schools, theatre and education through dance, didgeridoo playing and storytelling. He toured with the Batabah dance troop. Cedric grew up in Newcastle and attended culture camps

and they used to go around to different communities and Elders used to teach them dancing... Cedric would go on them when he was young...when old Bobby Campbell and them were still around teaching...like they were old school...the Dangari Dancers...were the first ones to go over to the Pacific Arts Festival.

Performance opportunities are difficult to organise. Jodie and Cedric’s children performed at the Koori Knockout, which is the main NSW cultural event on the Indigenous calendar. We organised this cultural camp and I put in an application and we got funding. The Wedgetail Eagles performed at the 2005 Wellington Show; we had about 15 koori kids dancing [who] have been nagging me when are they going to dance again? The dance group did not perform to a large audience at the Show due to poor organisation, although Jodie believes that audience is not the driving factor but
a sense of actually doing something together, having a sense of feeling good about what we’ve done...You’ve got to be optimistic with the kids.

Jodie views children who will continue practicing our culture... as our future in strengthening pride in Aboriginal identity. She is inspired seeing the children being happy and proud of their identity...because many generations were not made proud of who they were... It's about acceptance of being different. It is difficult to run the group hampered by issues such as public liability, but Jodie works within her circle of trusted people where there is a community effort in making costumes and running rehearsals.

Women Storytelling Educators

The women in Jodie’s family have been her biggest influence, particularly Aunty Joyce Williams, who is the first daughter: She was chosen...because her mother was the first daughter. Where Aboriginal men have lost their traditional roles as warriors, Aboriginal

women have been able to maintain our strength because we’re still the educators...
dreamtime stories are to teach our children morals and value systems...They taught them through stories, and that’s how come storytelling is an art and not everybody can tell a good story.

Mothers are the educators in keeping the family together, the network. With all the challenges of the western system, they have still maintained their strength and their dignity. Stories the women tell provide the strength to endure racial discrimination. As a consequence of these experiences,
Jodie’s Aunty stopped going to school, growing up with fear of authority. However this aunty has returned to complete her education and graduated with a Bachelor of Education. The story in Jodie’s family is that this Aunty was born special.

Jodie’s mother’s family was all on the Black’s Camp Nanamah, the Aboriginal Reserve in Wellington where people still live. Jodie’s mother was born at the present Hermitage Hill site which was the old hospital and the back section...was where the Aboriginal women had to have their babies. Jodie’s great grandma was a midwife and she delivered many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal babies locally. She was a very strong woman and had a...lot of influence out there on the Mission. She used to take my mum and all that out fishing and tell them all these stories and tell them about country...stories to country...It’s a very special place...shared country for special business. Different Wiradjuri clans would come here for certain business. It’s also a major burial here.

When Jodie was Curator for the Movin’ Round exhibition, she organised a bus and took the Wedgetail Eagles to perform at the Orange Art Gallery. Aunty Joyce had lived near there in the Springs, which used to be a fringe camp. Aboriginal people lived there ‘cause in the old days when they lived on rations, the husbands used to have to travel for work. So sometimes they would get their whole family and move up near the work. They used to go down there for fruit picking... They used to set up all their tents...they were all working class people, they weren’t just Aboriginal people...They used to travel for seasonal work.
Jodie’s family has maintained a connection to land by stories told in her family. Her great, great grandmother had a short period of disconnection when she was taken to Galargambone and

being the oldest one she came back here and her Aunty and Uncles and all them were all here at Black’s Camp and she was married and lived there.

When Jodie and her husband and children lived in Sydney they would come to Wellington and

my Aunty Joyce, she would pick us up and she would drive us around Stuart Town. Tell us stories. Take us to Guerie and tell us stories...We knew a lot of stories about this area because she would tell us... It’s part of our family history. My great grandfather was born in Guerie and his wife was born over at Curra Creek, but she had her children at Black’s Camp at Nanamah.

Jodie now takes her kids to the cemetery and drives them around Wellington and I tell them the stories that I’ve been told. Some of the stories connect with people in South Australia even though they’re a different language and so far away. Jodie believes that the Hindmarsh Bridge controversy in South Australia illustrated a profound ignorance of

Aboriginal stories that are passed down...That’s just a part of our cultural practices and beliefs that I maintain those things, and a lot of those old stories are passed on...not like ‘that’s just a myth.’
Jodie doesn’t have the whole jig saw puzzle... because even though I’ve been lucky that my great grandmother made it back here, we don’t know where all of her brothers and sisters are. We know her mother had twenty five kids. She knows about her relations who were

forcefully removed after the goldrush...Aunty Joyce starts telling us all the oral history...

We know we’re related through our great grandmother...We know she reared one of those kids up and we still have contact with his family... I can’t draw that out because we only know orally, but I don’t know how to write it out anyway.

Jodie would sit with the older people and listen to their stories. I wasn’t allowed to talk, weren’t allowed to join in discussion but I was allowed to sit. Jodie plans to document her family’s history

not just about me. It’s going back to that circle, it’s for my children too. I want to empower my daughter as well. I want people to know about my great, grandmother who was a midwife and what she has done... She’s left a legacy, like the work that women do and the lack of recognition.

Jodie wants to tell about her Aunty Joyce’s stories who is in her ‘80s ‘cause she knows all of our history... She’s told me a lot, but there’s so much she hasn’t told me...She was very close to my great, grandmother. She used to carry the torch for her when they used to travel of a night time in the horse and sulky when they’d go and deliver a baby...She was only a teenage girl... They are wonderful stories...People don’t realise the
way they had to survive.

As documented in Peter Read’s ‘The Hundred Years War,’ Jodie’s great great grandmother was removed from her tribal lands in the Wellington area during the government forced removals of the late 19th Century. This was during the gold rush period and pre dates the Aboriginal Protection Board.

Jodie’s great grandmother Granny May was one of twenty-five children, and was the only one to return to her homeland in Wellington. Jodie says her family is fortunate that Granny May is the link to ceremony and traditional language practice, which were mostly lost when families were removed from country during this era.

**Pro Forma Interpretive Summary**

Where Aboriginal men’s traditional warrior role has been eroded by colonisation, Aboriginal women have maintained their cultural practice as educators and keepers of knowledge through storytelling.

As an educator, Jodie aims to strengthen the circles that bond people in their relationship to country through storytelling.

Storytelling as an art form challenges intellectually, where new learning can occur.

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69 Added comments from follow up telephone conversation with Jodie, 21 February 2008
Contemporary Aboriginal oral storytelling transmits historical information and value systems that sustain cultural identity, which also serves to counter the official denial and silencing of Indigenous experience.

The 1988 anti-bicentenary protest was a significant Australian historical event that brought about the now widely recognised reconciliation movement.

Western society dissects art, music and dance and this process has led to stereotyping Aboriginal art.

The Wellington Wedgetail Eagle Dance Group encourages pride in Aboriginal cultural identity.

In her community involvement, Jodie also aims to teach her children values over personal acquisition.

As an Aboriginal arts practitioner, Jodie is committed to recognising contemporary regional and remote Aboriginal artists who have limited contact with established and resourced metropolitan arts organisations.

**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Creativity, wellbeing and cultural identity
- Storytelling and cultural identity
- Storytelling educates
- Women storytellers transmit knowledge as related to place
- Community driven cultural development
• Community professional arts development
• Cultural activism
• Government funded community cultural development
• Leader, facilitator and/or activist

2.3.8 Jane: Community Educator

Jane has been employed as an Aboriginal Family Health Worker in Wellington since 1994. She has worked extensively in child sexual assault and domestic/sexual violence. She has won many awards related to her community work with young people in Wellington.

Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Aboriginal Cultural Identity

Jane’s father is Aboriginal. Her mother, who was not Indigenous, was placed in care at four years of age, similar to Stolen Generations. Since she was very young, Jane was always concerned and active in speaking out against social injustice. She has spoken out to the media against local government and the police. Her parents didn’t question authority, but through Jane’s capacity to challenge the status quo,

I think I give Dad back his pride in his Aboriginality...started telling me stories...he hadn’t mentioned for years.
Aunty Joyce (Jodie’s mother’s sister) in Wellington has been a strong influence on me too, in affirming Jane’s belonging to the local Aboriginal community. Jane’s grandchildren perform in the Wellington Wiradjuri Wedgetail Eagle Dance Group where they are

*learning about their culture...because there’s nowhere at the schools or anywhere that it is ever portrayed in a positive light.*

Cedric is internationally recognised as a dancer and gifted in his approach teaching children dance. The dance group teaches Jane’s grandchildren to be proud of their Aboriginal identity, *which is still hard in this day and age.* Tjanara, Jodie and Cedric’s daughter, at times leads the group. Tjanara demonstrates pride and strength in her identity as a young Aboriginal woman, which Jane sees as a positive influence on her grandchildren.

**Community Educator**

Jane helped organise several drama teachers from Charles Sturt University in Bathurst to work with the local youth in putting on a play related to Aboriginal cultural identity. The play went to a *World Healing Our Spirits* Conference. In her position as Aboriginal Health Family Worker one of Jane’s goals was to promote a positive sense of cultural identity. She helped instigate a local Elder’s group that keeps track of local individuals’ cultural lineage. Jane also facilitated women’s groups that are involved in researching local Aboriginal history. Jane is a member of the Australia Day Council. There was no Aboriginal representation on the Australia Day committee until a local Italian man Lenny, invited her. This committee is *not even aware [of] the fact that that’s a Sorry Day.* Jane sees her role on the Australia Day Council as promoting local Aboriginal initiatives, such as the Wedgetail Eagles Dance group to the wider community. She
also sees her membership as an opportunity to challenge prevalent racist views. Jane has witnessed racist episodes like when she worked as a scrutineer for a local government election. She overheard a number of landowners express the view “pity we didn’t poison some more of the water holes.” She also found it affirming when a new teacher in the town spoke out in disgust of her experience of racism in the local primary school

because you think you’re being paranoid. What you were thinking was true. Someone with a clear view and she just pointed it out.

Jane sees the local mainstream community theatre rehearsal of Joseph’s Technicolor Coat as a good opportunity for Aboriginal youth to participate and that’s a good way to open the doors. Her son Ben Austin is an élite athlete, who was runner up Australian of the Year. Ben takes a community leadership role in his capacity as a recognised and respected swimming champion.

Health

Aunty Joyce headed up the Wellington Aboriginal Health Service, which organised dances connecting the various youth services. Jane sees these events as encouraging a positive sense of cultural identity. The local Aboriginal Health Service has become ineffectual due to being monopolised by an Aboriginal family that does not have the same level of health understanding as the previous Board of Directors and workers. Jane is committed to fostering a positive sense of cultural identity. She advocates a holistic approach to mental health as central to physical, social and emotional wellbeing. Jane strongly supports Jodie and Cedric’s Wedgetail Eagles Dance Group from her perspective as a professional health worker, in how this group promotes Aboriginal cultural identity.
Funding

In her capacity as Aboriginal Family Health Worker, Jane was responsible for intervention on a wide range of domestic and sexual violence cases. This included working with perpetrators, which ordinarily would be dealt with by various divisions of the mainstream health services. Jane has directly experienced youth suicide as related to child sexual assault. She views funding for identified Aboriginal Health positions as tokenistic. She advocates instead, for a holistic approach of interconnected programs with an educational focus that address the impact of colonisation, underlying Aboriginal individual and community dysfunction.

Personal Vision: Motivation

At the time of interview, Jane was close to burn-out and was on leave. She began radically but through years of experience has developed strategies that are more self-sustaining, rather than self-defeating. This includes her commitment on the Australia Day Council where I can chip away to make it positive. As a result of her commitment to changing negative stereotypes in the mainstream about Aboriginality, Jane has had to work hard at a positive self-image, in becoming more self-accepting of her radical stance. She is motivated in her community involvement by seeing children shine, so that they will be proud about their Aboriginal identity. Jane is affirmed in her role as community educator in the positive response and feedback she gets from the local Aboriginal women.
Pro Forma Interpretive Summary

Government Aboriginal health funding does not incorporate an interconnected approach to the underlying causes and symptoms of racism. A holistic approach would address physical, social and emotional individual and collective healing.

Culturally appropriate community dance and music assist in healing Aboriginal community dysfunction, by providing positive experiences that affirm pride in Aboriginal cultural identity.

Young people strong in their own Aboriginal identity need to be supported in the role they play, affirming pride and self esteem in other Indigenous youth.

Aboriginal cultural workers, radicalised through intergenerational racist policies socially sanctioned by non-Indigenous mainstream Australian society, need to develop strategies that sustain their own health and well being.

Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary

- Creativity, wellbeing and cultural identity
- Creativity and cultural identity
- Community professional arts development
- Government funded community cultural development
- Cultural activism
- Leader, facilitator and/or activist
- Women storytellers transmit knowledge as related to place
- Community driven cultural development
2.3.9 Melissa: Writer/Community Educator

Melissa Lucashenko is a Brisbane born Murri woman who lives on Bundjalung land. Melissa began working life in the early ‘80s as a barmaid, housepainter and martial arts instructor (she has a black belt in karate and was four times Queensland karate champion). Higher things soon beckoned, and Melissa achieved an Honours degree in public policy from Griffith University in 1988. She worked for a time in the federal Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, as well as in Indigenous Health. While attempting a PhD in the early Nineties, Melissa decided that anything had to be easier, and instead wrote her first novel, Steam Pigs. Published by University of Queensland Press in 1997 (while Melissa was living in the Kingdom of Tonga), Steam Pigs won or was short listed for several major Australian literary awards, including the Nita B. Kibble award for women's writing.

Her second novel, Killing Darcy, won the Aurora Prize for teenage literature, while Hard Yards was short listed for the NSW Premier's Award, as well as the Courier Mail Book of the Year. Too Flash – a novel for teenage girls - was published by Tjukurrpa Books in 2002. Melissa has spoken at major literary festivals in Australia and around the world. She is passionate about seeing Australia mature into a country where Indigenous rights are not only respected, but where Indigenous culture is embraced by the wider population as also being part of their birthright. Melissa lives in Byron Shire, south of Brisbane, where she works in her local community. She is reading the works of Jane Smiley and Barbara Kingsolver, amongst others, while she ruminates on her next slow-maturing novel.

* Bio supplied by Melissa
Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Aboriginality

Melissa earns a living by her writing, and is recognised locally as an Aboriginal person speaking on Aboriginal issues as well as other concerns. Melissa believes that levels of knowledge are changing, where massacres and removal of Aboriginal children is more widely known in generations of young people which wasn’t the case when I was growing up. These changes are occurring because Aboriginal people have entered universities, and there is now a mass of literate Aboriginal people who are no longer segregated on missions but are living in the mainstream influencing society, media, television, books and the education system. The 1988 Bicentenary was a major historical turning point, which influenced the Mabo decision ten years later. The Bicentenary raised issues for the nation...dragged out into the open...stuff that hadn’t been seen or heard before...start of a different dialogue that is still unfolding. She believes that political incorrectness is a term used to battle minorities, and that change in mainstream attitudes about Indigenous issues depends on white supporters and allies: It’s not just up to Aboriginal people to do that work.

Storytelling Educator

Melissa tells stories drawing on Aboriginal philosophy, aiming to educate her readers and audience. She aims for dialogue rather than telling people what they should think, believing that people’s humanity can be realised. She views her role as educating mainstream audiences through her writing on black issues. Melissa is motivated by her black readership. She gauges feedback of the impact she is having, by applause she gets at the writers conferences she regularly speaks at around the country.
Melissa is able to impact her community in the relationships she has developed locally, influenced by Barry Lopez’ idea of telling stories related to local community, where change is more possible.\textsuperscript{70} She gives talks at the local high school where she teaches by telling stories. Melissa regularly contributes to the NSW far coast local paper, the Echo. Her everyday community involvement, on top of raising two children and maintaining a farm, doesn’t leave much time for writing.

**Pro Forma Interpretive Summary**

Storytelling is a powerful educational strategy, which has a positive impact on wider attitudes in relation to Aboriginal issues.

Positive change in Aboriginal experience in Australia depends on white supporters and allies.

Social change occurs through dialogue and listening, where there is respect for people’s ability to learn.

The impact of the 1988 anti-bicentenary protest, which continues to unfold, also influenced the Mabo decision.

**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Cultural activism
- Storytelling educates
- Storytelling and cultural identity

• Women storytellers transmit knowledge as related to place
• Leader, facilitator and/or activist

2.3.10 Jill: Community Educator

Jill was born in Bathurst and her grandfather is Wiradjuri. She identifies as Ngiyampaa from her mother’s line. Jill is Coordinator of the Kelso Community Centre and is employed by the Bathurst Regional Council. The centre has been operating fourteen months, and she has been in the position twelve months. At the time of interview, Jill was undertaking doctoral studies in Indigenous languages at Sydney University. Jill’s staff comprises a receptionist and youth officer, each working two days a week. The Department of Housing has recently allocated a worker to assist with funding applications. Kelso is a suburb of Bathurst, which is divided from Bathurst by the Macquarie River. The Kelso Community Centre is located in the middle of a Department of Housing estate that has a majority Aboriginal population. The Centre was set up for all the community, and not just to service the Aboriginal people in Kelso.

Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Community Centre Coordinator

The Centre was established after a ten-year community grassroots campaign. People in Kelso need to commute to Bathurst for medical and pharmacy services and Jill is hoping that the Kelso Community Centre will be able to provide a medical service. Although the Centre lobbied in relation to inadequacy of the public transport service from Kelso to Bathurst, subsequent improvement has yet to deliver a satisfactory service. The Centre runs differently to most the other local community centres, in that there is a full time Coordinator who can respond quickly to
arising community needs. Jill consults monthly with an advisory committee made of local community members, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The advisory committee is comprised of an elected Executive, and anyone from the Kelso community can attend network meetings.

Through the advisory committee, Jill is responsible to the local Kelso community for organising programs such as needle exchange; sexual health; women’s and baby health; mental health; drug and alcohol counselling; legal aid; play group; after school sporting activities; art classes and TAFE run courses. Jill secured funding for a lawn mowers program aimed at building pride in the Kelso community. She is open to members of the community coming to her with ideas of possible projects, which is then put to the community to gauge interest. Then an organisation like Technical and Further Education (TAFE) is approached to run courses, such as the recent ‘cooking on a budget’ program; or Department of Community Services (DOCS) who provide training for people interested in becoming Aboriginal foster carers. The Centre is

only limited by the community’s imagination...For instance, at the moment we’re in the process of doing a computer literacy and job preparation program, because the community asked, not because we think it’s a good idea. It’s got to be what the community needs.

Jill believes that the key to running a good community service is outreach, rather than money being made the priority. The Centre is attempting to initiate an ‘adopt a Nan or Pop’ program to promote interaction between the older and younger generations. It was initially difficult to engage the older people as they believed the Centre was for the younger ones. However they are now actively involved, contributing ideas about skills and programs and they have quite amazing skills...want to share...with the younger people. Jill is also negotiating with the local Bathurst
theatre group because we have lots of kids that are quite talented...white and black. Jill is working with the theatre group to run a program at the Kelso Centre, because the Aboriginal kids won’t go in to participate in that sort of thing in town due to lack of funds and also transport difficulties. The Centre is investigating possible ways of funding this program, as well as applying for grants for Crocfest, because we’ve got kids who are quite talented musically. Jill is talking to volunteers who have the skills and are willing to donate time to teach music.

Indigenous Identity

Culture is not necessarily defined by race. Cultural groups can also be people who are socio-economically defined within a community. Jill believes that a strong perception continues that Australia is predominately Anglo-Saxon. She says we still don’t see ourselves as a country of multiplicity, nor has there been an acknowledgement of the country’s history.

Culture Camps

Jill has been involved in running camps for around twenty years. The camps were not funded, and for many years the money normally came out of our own pockets. However there is a reliance on younger ones…to start filling the gaps and they need to be paid. Therefore the program is about employment for local community members as well. She has been organising youth camps for the past four years with the Department of Education, with funding from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). However, with the changes to ATSIC, which then became the Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC), funding for the camps has come from DOCS. The closure of ATSIC impacted on running of the youth programs. These programs require anywhere between $50,000 to $80,000 a year. ...About 150 kids…go through the program each
year...majority...aboriginal kids. The organisers aim to run two camps each year classified as reconciliation camps where the aboriginal kids get to choose a friend...and we adapt the program. Children from Bathurst’s boarding school, St Stanislaus have also attended the camps because those kids have sometimes higher needs than even kids that have got both their parents and not boarding.

Jill’s view is that you can’t have culture without language. The camps are always run according to cultural protocol in collaboration with Elders because...It won’t work unless the Elders are part of the program. The themes of the camps are always about respect; respect for yourself and respect for others. The Bathurst group have allowed Cowra to come on board to get some knowledge and experience on how to run similar programs for their kids over there. The camps are not mixed: It’s either men’s business or women’s business. The aim is to retain children’s school attendance. It’s been a worthwhile program because 90% of our kids are staying on till Year 11 and 12. Jill believes that if change is not instigated by government policy, it’s never going to happen at a lower level. Althugh to some extent it happens at the grassroots because of what she has observed, in particular running youth cultural camps. The Aboriginal children at camps have come back and passed on knowledge about language, history and culture, which Jill sees is primarily about self respect. There is also an emphasis on teaching non-Indigenous children about Aboriginal culture, in promoting pride in culture

and those kids are going to grow up and be the adult leaders in our communities whether white or black...will have a lot less problems as time goes by.
**Pro Forma Interpretive Summary**

The Kelso Community Centre develops programs that respond to community interests and needs.

Many Aboriginal people living in Kelso have ties outside Bathurst, and the culture camps attempt to connect the children to Elders of their country, who teach language, history and culture.

Culture camps aim to promote respect for difference, and include participation from non-Indigenous children.

Government cultural policy needs to reflect Australia as a nation of multiplicity, rather than continuing a perception of an Anglo Saxon mainstream.

Outreach rather than money is the key factor to running a successful community enterprise.

**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Government funded community cultural development
- Creativity, wellbeing and cultural identity
- Leader, facilitator and/or activist
- Community professional arts development
- Community driven cultural development
- Storytelling and cultural identity
- Cultural activism
2.3.11 Gloria: Community Educator/Storyteller

Gloria is known as Dindima, and her Wiradjuri name is Guluuriya. Gloria is on the Wiradjuri Council of Elders. The Council was formed in 1992 in response to a call from the Indigenous communities across Wiradjuri land for a group of Elders to represent them for political issues.

Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Indigenous Educator

Gloria is more a community than political person. There are not many Wiradjuri families left in Bathurst. There was a re-settlement program over thirty five years ago where Aboriginal people were brought in from other communities mainly for education, housing, health, employment...So we’re really outnumbered here with some of the older families in powerful positions. Sometimes they do need reminding that they are just a visitor in this country. There are around three hundred families in Bathurst, which fluctuates when people go back home and then return. There are people like Gloria with similar Aboriginal ancestry, but who choose not to identify, and you’ve got to respect their reasons. Gloria views her fair skin as a positive factor in that she did not get taken away, and so was able to impact her local community with the Aboriginal cultural knowledge that was passed on to her.

Gloria teaches Wiradjuri language songs to the local schools. Indigenous stories teach values and morals. Gloria learnt these stories and songs from the women in her family. She also goes into the jails across the Central West where she teaches language stories: You can’t separate language, identity, culture...It’s who you are. Gloria is finding that people in the wider community are becoming more aware, wanting to learn about Aboriginal cultural heritage.
Storytelling Country

**Yowie Track**

The Yowie Track... *one of the places where a family of Yowies were...* at the Granites about 30 miles down the Wambool (Macquarie River):

> Out along the Fremantle Road, there’s a big deep water hole known as Johnson’s Hole, and just west of this is a big group of rocks called the Granites...and there’s a number of caves in those rocks. Wiradjuri people of the area call it the Yowie Track...The big hairy man is the Yowie, and the little hairy man who stinks to high heaven, is called the Ningari.

**Wondayali**

Wondayali is a Wiradjuri story about the Echidna. Wondayali was *a real cheeky fella* who would hide and wolf whistle the pretty girls and upset them while they were *digging for yams, getting some fruit or looking for birds’ eggs*. The Elders decided to *get rid of the problem... gave him a Message Stick* and sent him to Gundungurra, the Mountain People to tell them about a big meeting when the weather was going to be warmer. When Wondayali was coming into Gundungurra *just passed Lithgow*, he saw some pretty girls and

> was still up to his old tricks, but the Gundungurra women didn’t know him because he was a stranger in their country. He’d also broken law by not sitting down just outside of Gundungurra country, and lighting a fire to let them know there was a stranger coming in. So a party of warriors was gathered together to go and look for him.
The warriors found Wondayali preparing a meal and he got up and started to run so they started throwing spears at him...stuck into his back. The next morning the warriors followed drops of blood to a cave where

they saw a funny little creature that they’d never seen before. But they knew that it must have been Wondayali, because when they approached him he rolled himself into a tight little ball and whistled.

**Pro Forma Interpretive Summary**

Gloria passes on traditional knowledge, teaching stories and songs to the younger generation.

Gloria was able to escape the removal policy practiced by governments, because of her fair skin that allowed her to maintain a strong connection with her ancestral land.

As a Wiradjuri Elder, Gloria represents the Wiradjuri communities when mining companies addressing the Native Title Act, are required to negotiate with traditional owners. However, she finds it impossible to deal with their dissection of land, which traditional stories and song sustain as complete and whole.

Language, identity and culture cannot be separated.

**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Community driven cultural development
- Storytelling and cultural identity
Women storytellers transmit knowledge as related to place

Cultural activism

2.3.12 Nyree: Visual Artist/Community Artist

Nyree has been working in community arts since 1999, when she became a member of the Blayney Shire Arts Council. She formed the Blayney Youth Arts Council, an after school art workshop she ran voluntarily. As well as operating a business selling her own paintings, Nyree also facilitates community arts painting workshops. She is a member of the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative in Leichhardt, Sydney. Nyree was selected as an Ambassador for Seniors Week in 2005 and 2006 along with Jimmy Little, Jack Thompson, Henry Szeps and Donny Sutherland.

Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Aboriginality

Nyree identifies as an Indigenous (Gamilaraay) visual artist. She didn’t know about her Aboriginal ancestry until her sister researched their family tree. Their mother’s shame of having Aboriginal ancestry changed with Nyree and her siblings positive attitude about their aboriginality. Nyree’s paintings about the Stolen Generations are of faceless people, because their faces were taken as their identities were.

Storytelling

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71 See 2.3.7 Jodie’s interview for details regarding the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative.
Storytelling is a major focus of Nyree’s community arts workshops, because it deals with identity. Her projects have inadvertently centred on Indigenous young participants painting family stories because

*with Aboriginal kids, a lot of them don’t have pride in their ancestry, and this project was to keep pride going in their ancestry.*

Nyree paints Stolen Generations stories, particularly where they’re not able to. She sees that white people who buy her Stolen Generations paintings ‘connect’ to ‘feeling’ the paintings and she is able to visualise a history (white) people are not aware of. She has applied for an Australia Council grant to interview people impacted by the Stolen Generations, where she now wants to *paint in their faces...Now I want to do faces. I want to make the people real* so that people can now connect with paintings that have faces.

**Community Artist**

Nyree began working in community arts when asked to conduct a workshop at Orange Day Care. She then applied for grants to continue running community art workshops. Nyree was successful in applying for two grants to conduct five workshops at nursing homes. She ran one at Lee Hostel in Blayney, where a room at the hostel was turned into a gallery to exhibit the paintings. Nyree was employed to work on a project with a group of Cowra teenagers, painting banners that were on display in Cowra and at the High School. She worked with Aboriginal girls in Year 9 who were dropping out of school, and created an exhibition at Cowra High School with the girls’ paintings. Nyree collaborated with sculptor Ken Hutchinson in an exhibition of community arts participant paintings, linking the groups they worked with in Blayney, Orange and Cowra.
Member for Calare Peter Andren, has been supportive of Nyree’s community arts projects, and opened the Orange Mural project and the Blayney Day Care exhibitions. Prime Television and the Cowra Guardian also feature positive exposure of Nyree’s workshops and participant works. Nyree facilitates rather than teaches. Her style is to paint quietly in the workshops she conducts, and not intrude on their creativity because I hate anyone doing that to me. As she is also continuing to run her business, Nyree is beginning to tire with the many demands made on her during her workshops, particularly by intellectually disabled participants. The community arts workshops Nyree runs, has helped to strengthen her own voice, as well as developing her people skills.

Community Development Employment Program

Murdy Paaki Aboriginal Corporation won a grant to employ Nyree to work with a CDEP gallery of traditional artists in Broken Hill and Wilcannia. The aim of the workshop was to expand participant skills in traditional art painting. Nyree worked with participants painting in water color pencils, pastels and also assisted to work on pricing. Nyree also ran a workshop at Condobolin CDEP where members paint but don’t understand the color mix, or the structure. She helped workshop participants see how to use a variety of colors, which can be mixed with three primary colors and black and white.

Art therapy/Art as healing

Nyree believes that anybody can paint if they want to. She says that participants demonstrate growing positive self esteem from being creative:
It gives them a lot of self esteem, especially one fellow who was an alcoholic all his life...Now he’s in his 50s and he’s not drinking and he said, “gee, I’m someone now.” Because he said I was no-one before. I was useless, now I’m an artist.

Nyree finds that after being offered the opportunity to become creative, participants continue painting after her workshops. One participant planned to start a painting group at Lake Cargelligo as “It stops us from sitting around and doing nothing.”

Professional Artist

In 2006 the NSW Government Department of State Records through Link Up, exhibited Nyree’s paintings at the Stolen Generations Exhibition in The Rocks in Sydney. Nyree was also invited to exhibit at the Affordable Art Show at the Hordern Pavilion in Sydney for Art 05 and Art 06. She views these artist trade shows as opportunities to build her selling skills to the public. Nyree credits expanded computer literacy and instigating a website, as central to the structure and progress of her business. She attends forums coordinated by the Arts Outwest Regional Arts Development Officer, Hannah Semler. These forums aim to develop Aboriginal artists business skills. Nyree tends not to sell her paintings to prospective buyers only interested in purchasing art as a commercial investment, as she prefers that ‘her girls’ go to people who become personally involved with the paintings.

Funding

Nyree runs a business, selling her paintings to finance her professional work as an artist. She needs to apply for grants to run her community arts workshops with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people with disabilities; seniors; drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and prison inmates.
Nyree applied for a Regional Arts grant to run a community arts workshop at Weigelli Aboriginal and Alcohol Rehabilitation. Participants exhibited their works at the *Awakenings Festival* in Horsham in October 2006. Arts Outwest RADO Hannah Semler\(^\text{72}\) assisted in writing up the funding application. Applying for community arts workshop grants is a drain on time and resources, while Nyree is also trying to run a business, exhibiting and selling her paintings. There is a potential market for Nyree to sell affordable prints to buyers who are unable to afford her paintings, which will help her become more financially viable. She has applied for her first Australia Council grant, which she found difficult due to the required high level of writing ability.

**Motivation**

The effect of seeing the impact of her workshops on people in drug and alcohol rehabilitation continues to motivate Nyree in her community arts practice. She also has a strong spiritual philosophy. Her husband Peter is a moral and practical support in Nyree’s community arts practice, as well as in her professional capacity as an artist.

Nyree feels that her skill as an artist is undervalued, in that she is often requested to donate time and expertise to community arts projects. There tends to be an assumption that she would be happy to do this voluntarily. She is often asked to attend exhibitions where the auspicing organisation has promoted her without requesting her input, or offering to pay for attendance costs.

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\(^{72}\) See 2.3.4 Hannah: Arts OutWest RADO
Nyree is required to make pragmatic business decisions, due to financial constraints. As she often discounts her paintings so as to sell them, Nyree has begun entering competitions that will expose her works so as to realise their market value.

It is also becoming increasingly difficult for Nyree to continue her community arts projects because of increasing expectations and demands on her time and resources. These expectation include that she donate unpaid time in contributing to grant applications (City Council): That she supply unpaid evaluation and other documentation, a legal requirement of the auspicing body (TAFE): Pressure to complete a community arts project within a restricted time frame so that the auspicing organisation can complete acquittal and legal reporting requirements: That the community works including murals and public exhibitions be at a high standard, regardless of participant skill levels. This includes workshops with young children and disabled, which means added unpaid time towards finalising the project.73

Pro Forma Interpretive Summary

Nyree’s Stolen Generations paintings tell of a silencing of her mother’s feelings of shame and keeping the family’s Aboriginality a secret from her children.

As a community artist, Nyree’s painting workshops aim to strengthen participant Indigenous identity through storytelling.

Nyree’s community arts workshops assist participants heal with raising positive self esteem.

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73 Added comments from follow up telephone conversation 4 September, 2007
Nyree views her role in community arts as facilitating participants learning new skills.

Community arts workshops provide opportunity for community artists as well as participants to develop skills.

Community artists are often undervalued and prone to burnout due to auspicing educational, arts and cultural bodies’ expectation to donate skills, time, and energy, including supplementing financial shortfalls.

Although Nyree is committed to facilitating community arts skills, she is required by financial constraints to spend more time on her own professional practice.

**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Community driven cultural development
- Creativity and health: art therapy/art as healing
- Storytelling and cultural identity
- Cultural activism
- Leader, facilitator and/or activist
- Creative skills development
- Community arts foster artist skills development
- Community professional arts development
- Government funded community cultural development
• Diminishing resources in the community arts

2.3.13 Ruth: Multicultural Choir Coordinator

Ruth coordinates the multicultural Friendship Choir. She is the Bathurst Migrant Support Officer, a position funded by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. Ruth’s position is one of a number of projects run at the Bathurst Information and Neighbourhood Centre, funded by a variety of federal and state government departments. Each project contributes financially to the running of the Centre. The Centre’s management committee is comprised of volunteers, headed by a Coordinator whose position is funded by the Department of Community Services. Ruth also coordinates the local community radio 2MCFM International Friends Program roster, and encourages people to join and be trained in broadcasting. The program runs two nights a week with eight people who take turns to DJ an hour playing music from their culturally diverse backgrounds. Participants include people from East Timor, Malaysia and the Cook Islands, who have joined the community radio program through their involvement in the Friendship Choir.

Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Bathurst Cultural Diversity

There are over forty-five non-English speaking cultures represented in Bathurst. Ruth’s experience as Migrant Support Officer is that people generally wish to integrate into the local population, rather than trying to maintain separate cultural enclaves. The Filipinos are well organised and have a strong presence in the town due to large numbers of people from this country. People have more difficulties integrating into the town where there are fewer members
from their country of origin, as there are not the kinds of social networking infrastructure that occurs in Sydney and the larger metropolitan areas. These people need to make more effort to fit in and become part of the wider community. Some people have experienced racial discrimination, although Ruth does not believe this is systemic. There are not many people from an ethnic background in positions of responsibility in the township, and there is a sense that Bathurst is difficult to penetrate socially. Although the town appears racially harmonious, this has not been really tested. The Bathurst International Friendship Group is an organisation that has links to the Regional Advisory Council for the Community Relations Commission, a state body addressing migrant welfare. Some people join this group to get a foothold into other local social groups, whereas others have become long-standing members. Ruth invites people from the International Friendship Group to join the Multicultural Friendship Choir.

**Multicultural Choir**

When the Olympics torch came through Bathurst in 2000, the local community choir requested Ruth whether there were people from an ethnic background who would like to join them for a night. Ruth rounded up a number of interested people, and the idea to continue the choir came from Hai Choo. Hai Choo originally from Malaysia, works as a librarian at the local Charles Sturt University, and has been the central support in Ruth’s choir coordinating role. Ruth encourages members of the choir to contribute songs they already know, and then tries to reproduce them with the assistance from Hai Choo who makes audio cassette copies for each member. Ruth organises copies of text and also reminds people when rehearsals will take place. There are no membership fees, although members may be asked to pay for materials such as cassettes. Rehearsals are held at the Neighbourhood Centre, where rooms are provided at no cost.
Music was always an important part of Ruth’s childhood in Switzerland, not necessarily as an active musician but certainly as a listener. Ruth is not musically trained, although she has been a member of the local Allegri Singers choir, where members are auditioned and more commitment is required with two hour weekly rehearsals and extra time expected to practice before public performances. Ruth’s membership of the Allegri Singers has augmented her confidence and musical ability, which has assisted in her leadership role of the Multicultural Friendship choir. A visiting Kodaly-trained choral teacher from Hungary who was working at Bathurst University, instigated the Allegri Singers and encouraged Ruth to join. Although Ruth lacked the confidence, she eventually joined the choir with this teacher’s continued encouragement: It took me a long time before I did eventually join up. The Allegri Singers repertoire is mostly classical European/Western. Ruth is the only ethnically diverse member, and says it is difficult for people from a non-English speaking background to approach such an established choir: It’s just the kind of choir that it is. The community Friendship Choir that Ruth runs is culturally diverse with members coming from strong aural musical traditions.

Personal and Social Aims

The Multicultural Friendship choir has no restriction on membership, as it is more of a social group. The group meets to sing and socialise. When asked to join, many people say they can’t sing, but Ruth replies, “you don’t have to be able to sing.” That’s the type of choir it is. Ruth’s main motivation in running the choir is that members share the joy of singing. She is less interested in assisting people with personal problems. Ruth assists people in getting involved, however they must show interest as there are a lot of isolated people: You can’t make people do things...they need to come to you first and ask for it...you can only help them if they come to you and want help.
Skills Development

The Friendship Choir participants contribute songs from their country of origin, and the repertoire has included songs from Japan, France, the Netherlands and Malaysia. None of the Friendship Choir has musical training, so the songs need to be simple to learn. As participants generally do not read music, they usually learn the songs by listening to recordings. They will write their own phonetic translations to learn the pronunciation of songs in unfamiliar languages. A Dutch member recorded a round on cassette for members to take home and practice. The phonetics of an unfamiliar language is challenging, in particular for the Asian members. The group tried to learn a Chinese song but had to give up as it was too fast and the non-Asian members were unable to imitate the intonation. Hai Choo who identifies as Chinese Malay, does not speak Chinese, however she came closest to pronouncing the diction of the song. The group learnt an Italian song *La Lega* (The Union) which they like to sing, being full of energy and because Italian is a fairly phonetic language, they found it quite easy.

Although Ruth would prefer that the choir improve their performance ability, the aim is simply to enjoy singing and encourage friendships among the choir members. Ruth believes that occasional performances gives the group a goal to work towards, and so she organises the choir to sing at a functions such as International Women’s Day or International Friendship Group social events. The choir has helped some members find a voice in the local community. For instance Tere\(^\text{74}\) who is from the Cook Islands, is an original member of the choir. Ruth has noticed how much more confident Tere has become since joining the choir. Tere began hosting the Cook Islands

\(^{74}\) See 2.3.14 Tere: Children’s Polynesian Dance Teacher
radio program after joining the choir, and she has also started a Polynesian children’s dance group because one of the songs the choir learnt involved dancing.

**Pro Forma Interpretive Summary**

New residents, particularly from culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds need to make an effort to fit into the local community, as country towns can be difficult to penetrate socially.

Leadership in community development also involves encouragement into social groups that are accessible.

Members of the Multicultural Friendship Choir learn new skills in an informal environment, where there is also an objective to perform and therefore improve self confidence.

**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Cultural activism
- Community driven cultural development
- Creative skills development

**2.3.14 Tere: Children’s Polynesian Dance Teacher**

Tere was born in the Cook Islands, lived most of her life in New Zealand and then moved to Sydney. Tere then moved from Sydney and has been in Bathurst eight years. She is a volunteer on community radio 2MCFM, presenting a Cook Islands program. Tere started her own
children’s Polynesian dance group from her involvement with Ruth’s Friendship Choir, when the group sang a Cook Islands song for a Christmas function.

**Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics**

**Polynesian Dance Teacher**

Tere instigated a Polynesian Dance group for children, aged between three and twelve. At first the group consisted of Tere’s son and her girlfriends’ children, but now the group is comprised of three children from a Vanuatu background, one from Fiji, a boy who is New Zealand Maori, and three Anglo Australian children. Tere has been running this group weekly, over two years. They rehearse two hours from 6:30pm at the Bathurst Neighbourhood Centre. Tere funds the group’s activities including performances, and also picks up the children and drops them back home after rehearsals.

**Motivation**

Tere continues running the Polynesian Dance group because *I love watching kids dancing... I love watching the little kids, the way they move, the expression on their body [sic]. I go “wow!” It amazes me.* In the Cook Islands, Tere taught Hula dance to her girlfriends’ children who were too embarrassed to go into the Islands regular performance events. Tere was initially reluctant to take on Anglo Australian children with her Bathurst group, due to her experience teaching Hula in New Zealand with children who would not try anything different or new. However after the Bathurst children persistently pleaded with her, she finally relented. She insists that they participate, and *don’t just come and go to the corner and say “I don’t want to do it.” If you’re*...
sure, then come.” And so they keep coming. Tere wants the children to name the group, and until they do, they just call themselves a dancing group doing the Hula.

Teaching Dance
Tere leant to dance because in our culture...we make our kids dance from babies. Children are taught to tell a song’s story in dance as each gesture holds particular meaning. She teaches the Bathurst children traditional body gestures, which is difficult because they’re not Cook Islanders. I say “How do you say ‘come here’ in a dance?...” and I say “come here” [demonstrating]. I teach them things like that; the rain, the sun, wind [Tere gestures for each]. Children from a Fiji or Vanuatu family sometimes give Tere a song, and she may allow them to choreograph their own dance when she finds out what the song is about. The children ask why they can’t just dance without worrying about the song’s meaning, but Tere insists “that’s not in my way. I want you to tell the people what you’re dancing about...you are representing that country and what it means...If it says you are going fishing, represent that you are going fishing and you caught something.” Sometimes Tere will play a song in English and let the children loose, just jumping around.

Public Performance
The children have increased confidence and ability through performances. At the group’s first performance, the children were so scared and they didn’t want to dance. However, with the audience’s appreciative applause now they just love it. The children are more familiar performing for functions of thirty or forty people. She was amazed at the children’s excitement and anticipation performing for hundreds of people at the Australia Day celebration in the park. Tere
will canvass performance opportunities for the children, and will also be asked by her friends for the children to perform at their functions.

**Bathurst Community**

Tere loves living in Bathurst, and believes it is up to the individual to make an effort to meet people. She was attracted by the friendliness of Bathurst’s country living, which she immediately noticed moving from Sydney. She has close family in Sydney, New Zealand and the Cook Islands, but relishes living in Bathurst away from family because *you can’t do anything wrong, so here I can do whatever I like...there’s nobody to put you in line.* When she visits family in Sydney, she gets involved again with the Cook Islander culture. The Cook Islanders are New Zealand citizens and speak Maori. Although Maori New Zealanders and Cook Islanders identify as Maori, the New Zealand Maori language contains more words with English sounds, which makes it difficult to understand Cook Islander Maori.

Tere also volunteers as a presenter of a Cook Islander show on the community 2MCFM multicultural radio program. When she first arrived in Bathurst, she heard another Cook Islander woman on the radio and was curious about the program. She then approached Ruth (IFG Coordinator) who helped organise the training course. Tere sometimes speak Cook Island Maori, although she mostly presents in English, and plays music from her own CD collection.

**Music as Cultural Practice**

Bathurst does not have the community singing and dancing life Tere grew up with in the Cook Islands. Cook Islanders retain strong traditional connections, teaching their children song and dance as part of their cultural practice:
Back in the villages, they beat the drum up and off you go and practice. So everybody gets up and does their bit. There’s always the one that gets up and dances, always the one that sits and plays the drums, guitars and ukuleles... There’s always somebody that brings the equipment...Every time the church has a function we joined in that. There was always something you joined in...

Tere can play the ukulele and also learnt to play the drums. The girls generally play the ukulele and boys the guitar.

In our culture everybody is a dancer or singer. We don’t say that we’re professional dancers, everybody’s got it...It’s always been voluntary. In our culture we don’t get paid to be a dancer. When they go and dance, they get paid when people throw money on the floor in appreciation. That’s the only money they get paid.

Tere has found that music may not tell a story in dance, but is simply an expression of emotions like happiness. There are differences in actions and rhythm expressing different motifs. The actions of a song can express emotion (wedding song), but the melody represents the song’s imagery in rhythm (birds singing). Tere has found similar representations of song in dance with Japanese songs.

**Pro Forma Interpretive Summary**

Tere has adapted living in an unfamiliar Australian rural township by applying her musical and dance knowledge from her Cook Islander background.
Tere teaches the children of her Polynesian dance group how to tell stories with movement and gestures that hold particular meaning.

Regular performances of the Polynesian dance group, improve the children’s confidence and skills.

**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Storytelling and cultural identity
- Community arts storytelling
- Creative skills development
- Storytelling educates

**2.3.15 Margie: Theatre-maker/Community Performance Development**

Margie is a Theatre Maker *working with people to make theatre*. Margie qualified in Theatre Media at Bathurst Charles Sturt University in 1993. She continued her professional development in physical theatre with various companies in Australia and overseas. Margie collaborated with physical and visual artists including sculptors and puppet makers. She has community arts expertise directing, facilitating and teaching workshops, and has worked with young people at risk, homeless people and Indigenous communities. At the time of interview, Margie was employed as an Animateur at the Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre (BMEC); one of three new positions\(^76\) in a tripartite collaboration between the Australia Council Theatre Board (Community Partnerships), Arts NSW and Bathurst City Council. Arts NSW funds Bathurst Council.

Council to administer Margie’s position, who is accountable to BMEC Centre Manager Stephen Champion and Bathurst City Council Director of Community and Cultural Services Lesley Atkinson. The aim of Margie’s position is to encourage professional performing arts practice in Bathurst, by identifying local performing artists and arts groups that can benefit from mentoring, training and networking. Margie’s position also administers funding up to $50,000 a year to encourage community performing arts. This can include appointing external skilled artists to run projects. At the time of interview, Margie was one month into this position.

Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Community Art

Margie is experienced running workshops in physical theatre, puppetry, hip hop and R&B. She creates performances with at risk youth in detention centres who, although generally viewed as not having worth, really blossom through the arts. Margie believes that community cultural development needs to be sustainable, in that projects continue to benefit participants after the project ends and the artists leave. Margie is interested in promoting good art that also engages the community. She believes that exposure to professional work informs the process of growing community arts practice. Margie views the focus of community art to be on the process, although

77 See 2.3.6 Lesley: Local Government Community Cultural Development Director
there should also be an effort to make good work. Where there may be a level of corporatisation in arts funding organisations, there is also an interest in improving the arts.

Regional Arts

Artists in the city do not necessarily have more access to opportunities than their regional counterparts. Compared with the regions, the disadvantage metropolitan artists face is due to increased competition with a larger population of artists. A locality can be resistant to arts development initiatives:

When a community doesn’t feel like they’ve invited someone, then you’ll get resistance...The hardest thing is trying to please everyone and that won’t happen.

The challenge Margie has faced as a professional artist employed to assist development of individual and group creative skills, has been learning the local language. She found this in her work with youth in Karratha, Newman and Port Headland for the Perth Festival.

Indigenous Communities

Margie worked on a community arts project auspiced by the Tennant Creek local Aboriginal Council, who secured funding from the Department of Education and Training to employ artists to work with the young people. Margie’s experience at Tennant Creek was life changing in her work mentoring a local NIDA trained Indigenous artist. The project was successful in that the performance initiative continued after her work ended, although she intends to continue the collaboration to make a show there.

Amateur/Professional
Margie believes that an individual is an artist, even if they are not in paid professional employment:

\[
\text{Not that many people get paid, and so you can’t say that you’re not an artist because you clean a school. You’re still making art, and that’s your life work.}
\]

Amateur art is about local community and bonding. Professional artists are striving for the best piece of work you can make. Margie ran a project at Darlinghurst Theatre as part of her professional arts practice, funded by the Australia Council’s Community Cultural Development Board. Both amateur and professional art are equally valid in their own way: Everyone is inherently creative...everyone has their talent. Professional artists, skilled in their own practice, assist community creativity by using language common to all participants. Margie has found that her learning curve has been huge going in communities.

**Pro Forma Interpretive Summary**

Artists are also rewarded in their role enabling community arts.

Professional artists encourage skills development and enable community creativity by developing a common language of inclusiveness.

Although the focus of community art is on the process, the work should also strive to be good.

Regional artists have the advantage of less competition for resources and opportunities, as compared to higher concentration of artists in metropolitan areas.
Sustainability is a key feature of community cultural development, where benefits continue to impact the community after projects end and artists leave.

**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Community art storytelling
- Creative skills development
- Creativity and health
- Community professional arts development
- Creative arts build community
- Community arts process and professional art works
- Community arts foster artist skills development
- Government funded community cultural development

**2.3.16 Vandana: Community Artist/Visual Artist**

Vandana is a community cultural development visual artist, working in particular with culturally diverse groups. At the time of interview she was tying up projects she had instigated in her capacity as Cultural Diversity Program Manager with Community Cultural Development NSW (CCDNSW), a position that was being made redundant. Vandana was working one day a week to complete the projects she had instigated. Projects included the *Showcasing Diversity* publication, which was a six months training program for cultural practitioners applying a Participatory Action Research Model. She was simultaneously commissioned as artist-in-residence at Blacktown Arts Centre, working on a print and textile project entitled *Indigo*. This project

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explored themes of colour, stories, songs, and traditional domestic art, connecting women from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

**Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics**

**CCDNSW**

CCDNSW provides training and research development services to Western Sydney, the Central Coast and part of the Illawarra not serviced by Regional Arts NSW. The organisation also offers online user-pays CCD training and accreditation. Vandana began in this position in 2002; a year after CCDNSW had been established. Once Vandana had instigated the Cultural Diversity program, CCDNSW also initiated Indigenous and Youth programs. At the time of interview, CCDNSW was about to launch a Prospectus outlining the future direction of the organisation as a partnership-brokering agency with community and business groups.

**CCD: Bureaucratisation**

Vandana worked on the Australia Council’s Community Arts Board when it became the Community Cultural Development Unit in the 1980s. A shift occurred with the Keating Government’s merging culture and economic policy in how *arts and culture work in terms of economic development*. After a break having children, she returned to the field in 2000 when she noticed that the CCD sector

> felt it had become more professionalised and bureaucratic. You had to have a certificate to say you were a CCD worker

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80 See Footnote 101, page 212 regarding the closure of CCDNSW in 2010.
where previously there was the opportunity to initiate and fund programs that addressed
identified gaps in the sector, such as Information and Advocacy. Vandana says that community
cultural action then went into decline, taken over by a more professional model...feels more
prescriptive.

The sector also appears to be shaped by particular individual and arts organisations’ access to
funding, rather than from application of CCD principles and paradigms. Vandana questions how
CCDNSW Online Training charging a fee for practitioner accreditation, can continue to build and
nurture practitioners in the sector. Funding bodies keep changing titles reflecting shifts in cultural
policy. For example ‘multiculturalism’ is now titled ‘emerging communities,’ which Vandana
believes misrepresents the experience of groups such as refugees that is not restricted to a
particular ‘emerging’ time frame. Vandana views her CCDNSW Cultural Diversity position as
filling a widening gap occurring in the multicultural sector, demonstrated by the dismantling of
the Multicultural Arts Association and Carnivale. The Australia Council has allowed the CCD
sector to slip away in that they didn’t want to look at it anymore. However there has been
dissension over the decline that has shocked people within the Australia Council. I don’t think
they were expecting this kind of backlash from people.

Community Building
Vandana observed how Australia has got this fantastically developed infrastructure, comparing
the community cultural development sector with India while she was on an Asia Link Grant in
2004. Non-government organisations were more prevalent in India with projects instigated in
spite of not having the same developed Australian CCD infrastructure, because sometimes...just
having the political edge happens when people...have something to say and they’ll make it
Rather than working with the community to develop their response to some issue such as HIV Aids, the Indian NGO (non-government organisation) community arts projects tended to be limited to an educational function. Vandana believes that Australian community cultural practitioners excel in community consultation. It is an area of CCD practice that many agencies enquire about, and that could be promoted more.

Vandana identifies as a community artist facilitator in that she applies artistic and creative processes to create social change. I come from more than just making art. A successful community arts model has been Urban Theatre Projects ‘Back Home,’ picked up by the Sydney Festival and now in the next Sydney Festival, there’s going to be another community based theatre project. Political projects are not supported by Australian community cultural development funding bodies. Vandana sees this as problematic because community arts challenge negative mainstream stereotyping, such as a project Vandana worked on in Auburn with Moslem women.

Cultural Diversity Project

The interview included input from Magamase Ntlabati, a South African Project Worker who was collaborating on a leadership and mentorship program with African refugee women in Western Sydney.81 This projected, brokered by CCDNSW in collaboration with TAFE and the Australia Council, comprised fifteen women from African communities, including Sierra Leone, Sudan, Somalia, Congo, Liberia and Zambia. The training is designed to support refugees who don’t

have any infrastructure to connect them to services, which address the needs the women identify in their fragile communities.

One of the course objectives was to take women from isolation and bring them together. Magamase explained how the women developed project ideas around the African idea of Sabana; middle age women who are neither young nor old, and who are expected to conform in dress and behavior to traditional customs. On completion of the course, TAFE awarded the women with a Statement of Attainment for Employment and Education Opportunities. Vandana sees this training as a career path for the women to continue their cultural work in their respective communities.

CCD Evaluation

Vandana spent six months mapping the Western Sydney cultural landscape when she first started with CCDNSW. Although a really vibrant....hugely culturally diverse region, she found a significant number of cultural workers who needed assistance networking and documenting their projects. Vandana developed an evaluation kit to provide guidelines outlining the CCD process. The kit aimed to provide cultural workers with evaluation tools to help plan and document their projects. The documentation process of writing and video recording participant stories allowed cultural workers to critically analyse their CCD projects. She designed a two-day training program for cultural workers in local government and non-arts organisations that broadened their understanding of arts and culture. One such forum was with STARTTS (Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors). Forums were designed applying CCD practice, giving opportunity for cultural workers to critically analyse their work. CCD related issues such as sustainability, professional development, funding and leadership were
incorporated in the discussion. Participants debated whether their role was to facilitate, lead or be activists, with the group eventually deciding that they preferred to identify as activists.

**Storytelling**

Vandana views her community arts practice to be founded on telling stories:

> It’s about the narrative...all our projects have narratives...document all the time...allow the participants to record their own responses [that] shape that process.

When she went to India on an Asia Link Grant, Vandana initiated a three-week project, which was really about story...asking “who’s your best friend...?” The twenty stories culminated in an exhibition of printed images in a local gallery on the outskirts of Delhi. Vandana applies the Most Significant Change theory (MSC) that measures the community cultural development process. Rather than attempting to measure the impact of the sector statistically, the MSC model is a method that documents and records stories in writing or video, mapping emotional and different ways people react.

**Art as Education**

Community art challenges a static definition of ‘art,’ which Vandana views as an educational process. Cultural institutions as well as communities are educated in encounters where neither has really met before. Vandana relates her CCD experience of cross-cultural encounters, where people who come from historical and political difference, meet and create meaningful work that allows recognition of a common humanity in diversity.
**Professional Artist**

As an artist facilitator, Vandana creates community image and music making projects, drawing on participant skills, because *everybody has that capacity*. An artist facilitator has a *conceptual framework that [is] creative and artistic* which aims to encourage people’s art making. Vandana believes that artists need to work in management positions to survive financially *because you can’t survive as an artist...as a community based artist...I do step in two worlds all the time as an artist and also running projects.*

*I need both things. I need to work directly with communities; with people...It’s also where interesting things happen.*

Vandana’s Artist in Residency at Blacktown Art Centre is an opportunity to *develop my own professional...artistic work* which differs from her role as an artist facilitator.

**Personal Vision**

People working in community cultural development sell themselves short, due to lack of evaluation of the sector’s impact. Cultural workers need to document their stories, which should be broadcast to the mainstream to promote understanding of *other ways of talking about things* like *giving people disposable cameras and getting them to document themselves...We do need to look for models of cross-cultural work in Australia* which build on an understanding of *commonality in diversity.*

Vandana documented meetings held with artworkers around the time of our interview. These discussions were about whether they identified as leaders, facilitators or activists. Practitioners
did not focus on their arts practice as much as their role in community arts as facilitators and agents of social change. This point is in context of community arts viewed as a method that empowers the disenfranchised to grow in confidence so as to engage socially, politically and culturally. Leadership is a politically loaded term where artsworkers are given this definition externally by cultural policy managers and planners. The assumption is that artsworkers speak for the community; a position with which the artsworkers do not agree.

Vandana subsequently ran a community arts project where she saw her role as leader, teaching participants new arts skills. She views that this position complements the definition of community artists who facilitate participant cultural engagement.

The Australia Council’s Community Arts Program instigated in 1973, was founded on Government funding the ‘welfare arts.’ The shift of the Community Arts Program in 1987 to the Community Cultural Development Committee was also in response to a burgeoning era of economic rationalism in cultural policy, where art merged with culture. The sector has more recently begun to call itself the community arts again.\(^{82}\)

**Pro Forma Interpretive Summary**

Community arts practice is about people telling stories in the oral, visual and performing arts.

Making art in community is an educational process. This provides inclusive and cross-cultural encounters between people who may otherwise not recognise a common humanity.

\(^{82}\) Added comments from follow up telephone conversation 20 February, 2008
Australian community arts practice is a successful model of community cultural development, threatened by an increasing bureaucratic response to social and cultural gaps.

Recording community arts stories, rather than statistical analysis, allows for evaluation of an emotional process.

Tying cultural development to economic growth has led to diminished resources in the community cultural development sector. Artists are therefore generally required to work in administrative positions, rather than their preferred careers as professional artists.

The community cultural development sector is in dissension between practitioners who identify as leading community arts practice, from artists who view themselves as facilitators enabling disenfranchised sectors of the community.

Cultural workers need to document and evaluate their work so as to develop a critical theoretical model of community cultural development practice. This model would then clarify a method of community arts planning and management that could demonstrate the impact of the sector to policy makers, funding bodies and the wider community.

**Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary**

- Community art storytelling
- Storytelling educates
- Storytelling and cultural identity
Creativity and cultural identity

Women storytellers transmit knowledge as related to place

Community arts process and professional artist practice

Government funded community cultural development

Creative arts build community

Diminished funding for political arts projects

Storytelling documents and evaluates community arts

Leader, facilitator or activist

2.3.17 Lyndon: Artistic Festival Director/Professional Singer

At the time of interview, Lyndon was Artistic Director and CEO of the Brisbane Festival. He began in this position in 2006, after managing the Queensland Music Festival from 2000 until 2005. In this role he is responsible for a combination of artistic programming and administration; raising funds and managing the organisation’s budget. Lyndon has been a professional musician since the age of 21. He played in pubs as a jazz musician and was a backing singer in films and for TV commercials in Sydney. He attended Opera School, and from 1974 has been an Opera Singer with an international career. He has extensive experience in community arts practice having founded NORPA\(^3\) in 1993: Northern Rivers Performing Arts in Lismore, is a multi-art form organisation.

Transcript Analysis Preliminary Topics

Australian Tapestry of Cultures

Lyndon believes that creativity emanates from the specific culture of place, which he discusses in *A Regional State of Mind* published by Currency House. Every town, suburb and city in Australia

*has its own culture...need to identify exactly what those cultures are...They all make this extraordinary mosaic or tapestry...No such thing as an Australian identity...Someone who comes from Cooktown for example, has a very different view of the world than someone who comes from Sydney. So their identity is very, very different.*

The English language is the glue connecting Australians, rather an identifiable Australian national character. The culture of a place determines the creativity of that place. A Cultural Policy should reflect *the myriad of different cultures in Australia, because art comes out of culture*. Shows created with and for the local people, reflect the specific culture of the place

*so people understand the connection to where they live...All the making of art evolves, dependent on the contemporary culture of that time.*

**Community Art**

Lyndon developed *Bob Cat Magic* a music theatre piece, involving the local people of Mt Isa because it was about them...It also validates for them the culture of their place and the local people then see bob cats as performers...musical instruments...dancers. Lyndon adapted Peter Weir’s *The Cars That Ate Paris* as an outdoor rock musical in Lismore. The show’s script, new

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music and rehearsals centred on the specific culture of Lismore. He involved the local *feral kids* and the show toured Perth and Adelaide, *but it worked best in Lismore because it was about that feral culture at that place*. Community art has had bad press of its own making. Dissolving the Australia Council Community Cultural Development Board *was a mistake*. However the Australian Stories initiative is *being done extremely well*. The same level of funding for traditional touring shows that do not reflect the experience of where people live, should support new creative work that resonates and connects the local people to their particular place. Lyndon learnt to run a company from his experience with NORPA.

**Amateur/Professional**

There should be more emphasis on developing the capacity of Australian arts organisations to create work that connects people to place. Lyndon prefers the idea of making art in communities that tells stories and that connect people with where they live, even if that means attracting smaller audiences. Art must connect with the people in the pace where they live for it to have *universal resonance*... *Culture determines whether or not people make art*. Art does not depend on people being educated to understand it, or for it to be valid. *Pop music is really primitive*... *three chords and you can play most pop songs, but that doesn’t mean that it’s not valid*. Access to affordable digital technology has made it possible for individuals to become more creative. Developing personal creativity does not depend on where a person lives: *People who are genuinely talented will do it*. The key factor is whether *they really want to do it*. Lyndon believes the separation between professional and amateur art is an artificial division, in that either can be good or bad. The emphasis should be on whether a work is good enough to attract funding.
Arts Funding

Government funds the Brisbane Festival’s core programs, while private money is raised from collaboration with international companies, sponsorship and partnerships. Lyndon’s role as Artistic Director of the Brisbane Festival includes responsibility for raising private money, as well as managing public funding. He is accountable to the taxpayers who fund the Brisbane Festival. He tries to make ticket prices affordable, or make events free to allow for maximum community attendance. This has the added benefit of attracting further sponsorship money. Arts organisations need to become more adept at raising private money, and less dependent on government funding.

*The Arts are far too regulated. The traditional structure of arts organisations is primitive and old fashioned...Business restructures every 18 months, and arts organisations rarely if ever, do.*

Barriers to realising projects is *very rarely about money...Just thinking about what you do* and having a vision how to innovate outdated ways of doing things. It is possible to raise private money if management is willing. Lyndon advocates a modular system; that is removing the Artistic Director General Manager role, and replacing it with a Director of Departments...So that the flow of information is much broader, eliminating the bottle neck or gatekeeper. Government’s tendency to homogenise, and therefore control every aspect of what we do, becomes less of a determining factor of the kind of art created when diversity is promoted and realisation of original ideas is encouraged.
Pro Forma Interpretive Summary

The culture of a place determines the creativity of that place.

Community storytelling bonds people in their identity, as connected to the culture of a place.

Australian innovation comes from the diverse cultures making up its landscape.

Arts organisations can become less dependent on government funding by restructuring with money that is privately raised. Therefore new works can be promoted that connect people with where they live.

Making art that connects people with where they live, allows artists to learn management skills, as well as facilitating participant creativity.

Inducted Analysis: Theme Summary

- Community arts storytelling
- Creative skills development
- Creativity and cultural identity
- Government funded community cultural development
- Privately funded art
- Community professional arts development
- Community arts foster artist skills development
As described in 2.2 the gestalt method guided interpretation and analysis of participant recorded interviews. As detailed in this chapter, each participant’s interview was synthesised into Pro Forma Interpretive and Inducted Analysis summaries. The next chapter undertakes the fourth stage of the gestalt method, where the above interview summaries are compared and contrasted, and the thesis argument begins to take shape. A further refinement of the thesis argument is undertaken in Chapters 4 and 5, in the context of reviewed literature and applied theoretical paradigms.
CHAPTER 3 Topics and Themes

The gestalt method (see 2.2) guided interpretive analysis of participant recorded interviews into summaries, detailed in the previous chapter (see Volume 2 Appendices for individual interview transcripts). In this chapter, the thesis argument begins to take shape from topics and themes inducted, comparing and contrasting participant Pro Forma Interpretive and Inducted Analysis summaries.

3.1 Marginal Arts

The community arts sector is found to be a discursive construction that advocates ordinary people’s creative capacity. Interviewed participant Deborah refers to Gay Hawkins’ thesis regarding the community arts, and later community cultural development were bureaucratic inventions. Deborah raises what this research examines in relation to discourse implying meanings, that disguise aesthetic values, social ideals and economic objectives (see 4.5 Aesthetic Values, Social Ideals and Economic Objectives):

I think there’s always been a hierarchy of privileging certain forms of cultural production over others. That’s been with us since white settlement really, and people’s expectations and values and attitudes to the arts have been very strongly influenced by this hierarchy...I think the terminology is against us, as well as the fact that in Australia as a colony, the arts were seen as a way of establishing and maintaining class distinction. And so, the arts were consciously and deliberately manufactured as an élite activity. If you look at the influences

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of utilitarianism in the 19th century, the arts were seen as a civilising influence. So if you got the great unwashed, and you exposed them to the arts, they would somehow become better people. If you read about the development of museums, they were seen as educational; an altogether worthier alternative to circuses and side-show alleys and vaudeville which were seen as very tacky and grubby and lower class.

Rhetoric in support of funding the community arts is viewed as scripting difference as marginal to a totalising narrative of Australian cultural identity. Margie for instance says her community arts workshops are with people at risk, the homeless and indigenous communities. Michael also defines ‘community’ in the arts as having numerous connotations. ‘Community’ can refer to a group of artists; an arts organisation; a group with specific cultural needs such as youth, elderly citizens, people with disabilities; or new and emerging ethnic communities. He states that government language about arts and cultural development changes and evolves decade by decade. He cites ‘CCD’ and ‘multiculturalism’ as having gained traction in the 1980s with governments that triggered significant growth and support. Vandana on the other hand says that an ideologically loaded term such as ‘multiculturalism’ is now labeled ‘emerging communities,’ which she believes misrepresents the experience of refugees who are not restricted to a particular ‘emerging’ time frame.

Deborah suggests that the political debate about Australian traditional values has been divisive, in effect segregating minority groups. It becomes apparent that scripting difference is constructed as marginal to a totalising discourse of Australian cultural identity, which is discussed in the following section.
3.1.1 Scripting Difference as Marginal

Shifting arguments for funding the community arts has tended to script difference as marginal to a totalising narrative of Australian identity. Jodie for example describes her work with the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative, initiated by a *mob of artists who could not fit within a stereotype, and the galleries wouldn’t show their work*. These artists included Michael Reilly, Tracey Moffat, Fiona Foley, Avril Quayle, Jeffrey Samuels and Brenda Croft:

*Tracey Moffat eventually resigned. She decided she didn’t want to be put in that box as being an Aboriginal Artist…tokenised…I really related to why she did that.*

Jodie says *you’ve got to dissect yourself...because of the way the system works* in mass producing stereotyped Aboriginal art, like dot paintings and Albert Namatjira’s landscapes. She adds *I’m tired of stereotyping in Aboriginal Art...we at Boomalli, that’s what we fought against.*

Nyree also identifies as an Indigenous (Gamilaraay) visual artist. Her paintings of the Stolen Generations are generally of faceless people

*because their faces were taken as their identities were....I link very strongly...with Stolen Generations...because mum was told to deny her Aboriginality. When we were growing up, we didn’t know that we were Indigenous...My sister’s doing a family tree and she found our Aboriginal ancestor, and that’s when mum said you’re all going to be ashamed of me now...We said “No way”...because she’d been brought up to be ashamed of it. She was shunted from pillar to post so that she wouldn’t be taken... So that’s why I can sort of feel*
for the Stolen Generations kids...I need to get their stories out. If they’re not able to, I’m going to hopefully be able to do it.

Bruce provides the clearest example of scripting difference as marginal to a totalising narrative of Australian cultural identity. He says that migrating people to the district have brought different values

than those based on the British Empire and the Queen and all that, which this multicultural scenario I think might have been a deliberate attempt by the government when they started it ... Keating I think, started to bring in more people from non-English speaking backgrounds in here to give a different cultural identity to what we have. And that’s broadened...Because I lived in Canley Vale where the dumping ground was for all of the migrants coming in from the second world war when Russia was invading all those countries in Europe and they were coming over... so I was brought up with people like Hans Zecovic and Joe Mascovitch and all of these people... because I grew up with them, those kids that came at that young age when I was in primary school, they’ve grown up now to be Australians, and they haven’t got all of the hang ups from the problems of the past. Their parents did, and of course generationally they lose it. They still maintain a loose connection. With a name like mine, Fitzpatrick obviously there’s an Irish connection on my father’s side, but it’s not strong because I’d be multi-generational Australian, but you still have an affinity with the Irish because you have an Irish name. I think things are moving quickly, and changing from what was traditionally the iconic Australian lay back bronzed aussie “How’re you going mate?” easy going, nothing’s impossible; to something far more complex and complicated and diversified.
Following on from how participants draw on a script of a unified Australian cultural identity, it becomes evident that creative practitioners, who identify as deviating from this norm, mobilise social and political change, as detailed in the next section Cultural Activism.

3.1.2 Cultural Activism

It is apparent that artists mobilise social and political change that aims to impact a universalising narrative of Australian cultural identity. Melissa for instance earns a living as a writer. She believes that levels of knowledge are changing where massacres and removal of Aboriginal children is more widely known. The current generations of young people are more aware, which wasn’t the case when I was growing up. These changes she says are occurring because Aboriginal people have entered universities, and there is now a mass of literate Aboriginal people who are no longer segregated on missions but are living in the mainstream influencing society, media, television, books and the education system.

Jodie also explains that many of the exhibitions at Boomalli played with Aboriginal stereotypes, and therefore were political:

Ohhh kitsch coffee tables and tea towels... Nigels and Jeddahs sitting in our front gardens...hate blackfellas but they’ll have a Nigel sitting in their garden; blackfella with a spear. All that kitsch stuff... but we’d take the piss out of it and do kitsch exhibitions deliberately... black humour, like we’d play around with that... That challenges things...
That’s on the edge... got a bit of humour... It’s a great experience to actually be challenged and to actually learn something new.
Jodie explains how artists impact social change. The Boomalli artists were consulted on cultural issues for curriculum publications. The NSW Board of Studies

*actually had an Aboriginal Unit and they worked with the wider community. If they had to deal with an Aboriginal health issue, they went and talked with the Aboriginal Health Service. It was a really good relationship, and those relationships are still...in play.*

She says that the Boomalli artist’s cooperative also attempted to establish a regional artist’s network with the aim of addressing limited connection of remote Aboriginal communities with regional art galleries. A Regional Art Network was also set up by the State Government that *lasted 12 months, because it was set up to fail.* The appointed artist was situated at the Liverpool Casula Powerhouse as a *tokenistic gesture*, which did not address the issues for which the collective had lobbied.

Jodie describes how the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative assisted in the organisation of the 1988 anti-bicentenary protest. The artists also mobilised what is now known as the Reconciliation Movement, by bringing *people together. A lot of things changed.* Musicians involved in this protest movement included Paul Kelly, Midnight Oil and *where Yothu Yindi got their first break....A lot of non-Aboriginal people were very actively involved in that,* which was a reconciliation movement before the government funded Reconciliation Councils. The NSW Premier Nick Greiner reinstated the Summaries Offences Act in 1988, and as a result many Aboriginal people were arrested during the anti-bicentenary protests. Melissa also talked about

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86 Boomalli’s instrumental role in the 1988 anti-Bicentenary March is cited in Croft (1990); Perkins & Lynn (1993); Lee (2000). Founding artist member Tracey Moffat was arrested by London police in voicing her opposition to the UK staging a re enactment of the First Fleet (Crawford 2008; Riley & Fisher 1988).
the Bicentenary as a major historical turning point, which influenced the Mabo decision ten years later. The Bicentenary raised issues for the nation...dragged out into the open...Stuff that hadn’t been seen or heard before...start of a different dialogue that is still unfolding.

However Michael says the Bicentenary was primarily a celebration of community cultural development and a multicultural festival:

*The Federal Government released substantial funds for touring, celebration, tall ships and festivals. The 1990s recession prompted a gradual change, saw the introduction of new DOCITA programs [that] culminated in the Centenary of Federation.*

Michael says that all levels of government are now more strategic about cultural planning. NSW has drafted and is implementing a well defined State Plan.

Michael’s point signals a consequent change in rhetoric advocating funding the community arts. The aim of increased strategic planning is to integrate the development of professional artists capacity with growing economic and social capital. Vandana explains the shift for funding community arts, to a more professional approach. She describes a change occurring with the Keating Government’s *Creative Nation*, merging how arts and culture work in terms of economic development. Vandana was on the Australia Council’s Community Arts Board through the early ‘80s to 1991 when the Community Arts sector changed to Community Cultural Development. She says that the transition was part of Keating’s vision for creative communities, where cultural planning emphasised economic rationalism. Community cultural action then went into decline, taken over by a more professional model that tended to be more prescriptive.
The study surmises that definitions of ‘culture’ are linked to an integration of economic, social and environmental planning and management. Michael confirms that Richard Florida’s creative industries model has had a populist impact on Australian cultural planning. The manifesto identifies regions that have high densities of professional skill diversity, resources, cultural facilities, communications and information technology, and these are integrated in a cultural economic drive that powers the economy. Michael says

\[
\text{one of the catalysts for economic change has been cultural development and community cultural development. Arts NSW underlying strategy is to integrate cultural development into community development.}
\]

This point is examined in the following section.

### 3.2 Local Government Social and Economic Cultural Management Role

Local Government cultural planning is voluntary, and generally viewed as complementary to the mandatory Social and Community Plan. Councils are encouraged to evolve from their traditional role of ‘roads, rates and rubbish’ services provision, to spontaneous interest in their local community’s cultural growth and development.

Deborah wrote the *Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government* (2004). She says that although councils are not required to undertake cultural planning, many local councils in NSW undertake the process, with the initiative often coming from an Officer and occasionally from

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elected representatives. She identifies an international agenda for culture and local government bringing together government and NGO service providers. This idea began back in the 1980s with what was called Integrated Local Area Planning or ILAP, where the Australian Local Government Association argued that they needed to be an equal partner at the table with federal and state government, rather than being treated as poor cousins.

Michael says there is a growing trend for community cultural development to be managed by the local government community and social services structure. He has observed a generational change occurring over the past fifteen years in local government practice: From a defensive to a responsive concern for community aspirations regarding arts and cultural expression. He reports state government culture and arts policy advocates that local government is responsible for managing cultural development, and that individual councils are encouraged to apply for Arts NSW funding.

While state government agencies provide councils with incentive funding aimed at developing local cultural infrastructure, local government is encouraged to apply for funding for specific cultural projects. Up to a thousand applications are received each year for Arts NSW grants, fellowships and awards. Michael views this grants process as a form of cultural mapping and scoping that builds long term relationships with particular local councils.

Arts Northern Rivers works with and is funded by the seven Northern Rivers local governments comprising the region. Lois says that government funding has a huge impact on the continuing cultural development of the region. Local councils provide 60% of Arts Northern Rivers funding,
while the remainder must be raised by targeting grants programs such as the Regional Arts Fund which supports Arts Northern Rivers Visual Arts Network and youth arts.

Hannah is also reliant on local councils, which fund virtually half of the core programs run by Arts OutWest. Hannah confirms that building constructive relationships with local government is requisite to realising community arts and cultural development outcomes. Local councils’ membership fees help fund Arts OutWest in its role that incorporates promotion and support of local arts councils where these people are part and parcel of their communities. Hannah says that the larger councils do see their role as subsidising an aspect of the smaller communities’ cultural development.

Bruce talks about Oberon Council’s financial support of Hannah’s Arts OutWest program. He sees Council’s role as promoting local community cultural activities. He says that apart from local government core duties being roads, sewage and water, Council’s cultural programs include playing fields and auditoriums where the community can produce plays and musicals. Bruce points out that Oberon is a small country town with a population of over 3000, and therefore cannot provide cultural services such as theatres and galleries that major regional cities Bathurst, Orange and Dubbo have built.

Increased responsibility on local councils as cultural planners and managers is proportional to the declining role that state and federal agencies have traditionally undertaken funding community cultural development. Deborah for example says that federal and state authorities have increasingly shifted costs to local government, expecting an increase in responsibility without providing adequate resources to support a commensurate growth in infrastructure. Lesley
confirms that the state has cost shifted to local government. One of the measures has been to fund the Local Government and Shires Association to employ a Cultural Officer who works with local government.

Bruce says grants are an important source of funding services to the community. He maintains that local councils can be overridden by state government in the development approval process, under the guise of acting for the common good. State and federal governments have

\[\text{power because they can bring in legislation. The Local Government Act is an Act of State Parliament. If they repeal that we don’t exist [and there] is nothing under the Constitution that recognises local government.}\]

Michael, Hannah, Lois and Deborah state that the Regional Arts NSW Boards comprising the Regional Arts Australia national coalition of community cultural development service providers, is arguably the best developed regional cultural structure that is being emulated by the other states. However it becomes apparent that institutional funding for art and cultural programs has produced a complex and bureaucratic management structure, restricted to operators who have insider knowledge and the capacity to navigate highly regulated processes. Michael sees particular professional artists and artworks who have become successful at sourcing federal and state funding:

\[\text{It’s one of the unstated facts of life in the arts today now; that if you want government support, you really need to be a professional arts person. There’s no way round the fact}\]
that having the qualifications and the training, and the experience in the arts...or you need
to have very direct access to a professional arts officer who is experienced in this area.

Hannah also says that funding is difficult to access for individuals, unless you’re a practicing
professional artist...need to be auspiced. Hannah reported at the time of interview, that no
regional arts program within all of NSW had received funding from the Australia Council
administering Community Cultural Development grants, in spite of applications including
ours...very disappointing. Lois corroborates the point when she says that most of her role is
taken up applying for funding which she views as being such a specialist thing. She says the key
factor to successful funding applications is to

develop professional relationships, first with the regional representatives of all of these
agencies, and then work together with them to develop proposals...You have to talk to
everybody and then work together with them to develop it.

Bruce agrees, saying that applications for state and federal grants in realising local community
needs, require developing a rapport with those in lower government positions and working these
relationships

until you get up the top, because if you don’t go from the bottom up...you’re going to find
obstructions in the middle.

Lesley states that state and federal funding is now being made available for local governments
who have got a cultural plan in place. This demonstrates to funding authorities that local
government is committed to long term strategic cultural planning. Lesley maintains it is still important to address the economic criteria of funding applications, even where the aim of the project is not for profit. Lesley would prefer to develop projects identified by the local community, but talked of resentment when cultural programs need to fit funding criteria; because you end up shaping a program to fit whatever grant monies are available.

Michael asserts Arts NSW policy is to encourage cultural development as part of the mandatory social and community planning process for the 151 local councils across NSW. He does not view that funding drives a cultural agenda, citing that the aim of the

* Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government [is to enable] culture and arts development become part of the social and community planning process.

Interviewed arts and cultural policy managers generally concur that culture does not require to be mandated due to key individuals identifying and driving local community arts and cultural programs. This finding is explored in the following section.

**3.2.1 Community Driven Cultural Development**

It is evident that key local individuals instigate local arts and cultural projects. Michael observes that it is the persistence of particular individuals who take on leadership roles in their local communities, that is the significant factor driving creative projects:

*Unless you can find a project leader, often a country woman or a motivated group of people, the funding in itself will not get the project off the ground.*
Bruce agrees that most of the cultural issues come from the community, in that they identify that there’s a need. There’s always a small nucleus of people who have a strong interest in things, and they’re often quiet achievers that you don’t notice.

Hannah also cites self-funded community arts projects that are sustained by volunteers and loyal local audiences. Musical and dramatic societies have become very strong in the region, and these groups have their own audiences because people are loyal to their locals. Lesley agrees that the presence of key individuals and groups who articulate local cultural needs and aspirations, is the reason why Bathurst does not follow the usual local government process of linking cultural planning with the Social and Community Plan. She reports the Bathurst Regional Council ethos is that the local community should drive cultural initiatives, and that this has allowed key individuals and groups’ success in establishing local arts and cultural projects. She cites Bathurst’s changing population with an influx of professional retirees from Sydney who are aware of infrastructure that they would like to have from a cultural perspective... who know how to lobby the councilors...get what they want.

Lyndon demonstrates this kind of individual enterprise in founding the Lismore Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NORPA) multi-art form organisation. Jill relates how the Kelso Community Centre was the culmination of a ten year grassroots campaign, which is now funded by Bathurst Regional Council, and Ruth also demonstrates individual endeavour founding the Multicultural Friendship Choir.
The next section demonstrates the creative industries as a strategy designed to grow the economy; and community cultural development as a model that aims to facilitate social capital.

### 3.2.2 Creative Industries and Community Cultural Development

The distinction is made between the community arts as a process that promotes community bonding, and the professional arts that drive local and regional economies. Where community cultural development is exemplified by projects that promote building social networks, the creative industries model is identified as a cultural economic development strategy. Michael, Margie, Lesley, Deborah and Hannah clearly distinguish between the community arts as a process that develops social networks, from the creative industries which Hannah describes as maximising economic value for creative output, in the development of artists’ skills aimed at attracting paying audiences.

Michael for example believes the arts are integral to life long learning and well being. He says that there are equal arguments for arts and cultural development for their own sake, as best practice, as well as excellence in high professional standards. Margie also clearly distinguishes between professional and community creativity. She believes that although community art should strive to make good work, the focus is more on the process. Her professional arts practice aims to produce the best work possible that communicates with an audience.

Both Lesley and Hannah maintain that because galleries and museums are generally only accessible to professional artists, community art needs to be supported because it allows access and opportunity for ordinary people to develop creative skills capacity. Hannah promotes projects that build community where her role is to encourage people to
get involved in something in which they wouldn’t otherwise...and then you’re starting to talk about a community.

However Lyndon does not believe in a distinction made between professional and community art, as either can be good or bad. Instead the emphasis is on ability to attract funding. In his own collaborative arts practice, Lyndon does not just bring in a show to a locality, but will appoint skilled artists to work in that town with those people to develop a script or write a new piece of music.

Both Deborah and Vandana give examples of the community arts that build community. The creative process is viewed as holding the capacity to activate new knowledge that can build bridges between different groups in the community. It is then possible for insights to emerge between members of a community that creates social capital. Deborah explains that virtuosity in the community arts needs to be defined as an achievable objective. This kind of creative excellence therefore engages participants and audience. She supports community arts projects where artists apply technical skills, allowing audience to engage in a process of community building where the familiar is seen in a new light. These community arts projects are motivated by desire to create artworks which profoundly move participants and audience, leading to new understandings and insights about the lived experience.

Lyndon, Margie and Nyree demonstrate how they have learnt new skills in their involvement in the community arts. Lyndon credits his experience founding the Lismore Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NORPA) community arts enterprise as important in developing skills required in his position as Artistic Director and CEO of the Brisbane Festival.
Margie cites a community arts project she worked on, funded by the Department of Education and Training with the Tennant Creek Indigenous community. She says that her learning curve has been huge going in communities, particularly in the work she did mentoring a local NIDA trained Indigenous artist. This experience was life changing in how much Margie learnt with an Aboriginal woman who is a local woman.

Nyree’s own professional development has been assisted by her involvement in the community arts. She has had positive media exposure for her community arts projects, and she recognises that her people skills and ability to work with people with special needs has been enhanced.

Current cultural policy appears to be driven by funding priorities. It is evident that projects fitting funding authorities criteria have increased chance of success, in that submissions demonstrating social and economic outcomes are more likely to attract funding. Lois for example defines community cultural development as art, cultural, social and/or economic development, depending on the funding organisation’s criteria:

*If you are dealing with an arts organisation, then you argue cultural development. If you are dealing with FACS [Family and Community Services] or a community or a social agency, then you have to argue social and community development. If you are dealing with the Department of State and Regional Development or the federal government, you have to argue economic benefits.*

Lesley, Michael, Hannah and Lois discuss convergence as a whole of government cultural management strategy. Arts and cultural groups and organisations are encouraged to collaborate so
as to capitalise on what is widely regarded as diminishing resources. Lesley reports that the Cultural Accord has changed for *this three year triennium...focusing on...convergence where cultural groups* such as libraries, museums, gallery and archives work more closely together. *It’s a definite change in the way that they’re viewing the cultural scene.* Michael explains that local councils are encouraged to work collectively in sharing resources, which will assist in developing cultural enterprises and cultural tourism with galleries, museums and festivals. Hannah also says that

> *CCD outcomes can be achieved [by]...developing...partnerships and attracting other...non-arts monies...makes it possible for arts and cultural outcomes to be regionally relevant.*

Lois has been successful with funding applications because the Northern Rivers region is able to demonstrate a burgeoning creative industries sector in multimedia and film enterprise. Lois credits her achievement in developing a creative industries model in the region because she has been able to demonstrate both *social and economic benefit to the community* in her funding submissions.

Deborah believes that culture should be mandated because communities do not have the capacity to drive art and cultural development due to diminishing resources. However Lyndon does not believe that culture should be mandated because

> *the arts are far too regulated...The traditional structure of arts organisations is primitive and...old fashioned...Business restructures every 18 months, and arts organisations rarely if ever, do.*
Lyndon believes that a cultural policy for Australia does not

make sense because every town and every city has its own culture and you need to identify all of those cultures, and in larger cities there are a myriad of different cultures. You need to identify exactly what those cultures are and address those cultures and they all make up this extraordinary mosaic or tapestry.

Lyndon’s proposal that localities creatively express specific vernacular cultures is a theme discussed in the following section.

3.3 Storytelling

Storytelling is highlighted as a significant creative practice. Vandana says that making art in community is about the story...about the narrative...all our projects have narratives. Vandana went to India on an Asia Link Grant. She instigated a three week project which was really about story...asking “Who’s your best friend...?” The initiative culminated in an exhibition of twenty stories in printed images. In Blacktown she brought together women from the Asia Pacific and using the concept of the Monsoon to develop songs and a choir...around that and collect the music and then...tell stories of the Monsoon and what it represented and what it means here.

Lyndon says that his community arts practice is about telling stories that link people to the culture of their place. He creates performances that aim to identify the specific culture of a place
that will engage those people; creating work that really reflects that, so people understand the connection to where they live.  

Storytelling emerges as a collective creative method that facilitates expression of cultural identity, which is a theme explored in the next section.

### 3.3.1 Storytelling and Cultural Identity

Storytelling emerges as a critical creative method that facilitates expression of cultural identity. Lyndon cites *Bob Cat Magic*, a music theatre piece he produced involving the local people of Mt Isa because it was about them...It also validates for them the culture of their place. And the local people then see bob cats as performers...musical instruments...dancers. Lyndon adapted Peter Weir’s *The Cars That Ate Paris* as an outdoor rock musical in Lismore involving the local kids. The show’s script, new music and rehearsals centred on the specific culture of Lismore. Although the production toured Perth and Adelaide it worked best in Lismore because it was about that feral culture at that place.

Tere corroborates this view saying that she tells stories in song and dance that define her as a Cook Islander. She teaches the children of her Polynesian dance group how to tell stories with movement and gestures that hold particular meaning. The dance movements signify the song that is about things like the rain, the sun, wind. She explains that dance for Cook Islanders always represents the song; you make yourself [sic] as the song is, so you show...you have to tell what the song’s about.

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89 Lyndon’s ideas detailing how the creative arts express peoples’ connection to the culture of place are discussed in his essay *A Regional State of Mind* (2007).
Storytelling as related to identity is a major focus of Nyree’s community arts workshops. She aims to strengthen participant Indigenous identity. Her projects have inadvertently centred on Indigenous young participants painting family stories because

with Aboriginal kids, a lot of them don’t have pride in their ancestry and this project was to keep pride going in their ancestry.

Jane also believes that stories told in dance and music assist in healing Aboriginal community dysfunction by affirming positive experience of Aboriginal cultural identity. She is inspired seeing children shine like

when I see the kids dance I get overwhelmed...It’s like healing for me...I think that’s what I’m about...I just would love to see them be so proud about their Aboriginality. There are so many that are not...and we’re working hard to try and help them to achieve that because it is hard work.

The role of women is evident in telling stories that link identity with the culture of place. Gloria’s interview illustrates how women in the role of tradition bearers, pass on stories as a continuum of traditional knowledge that maintains the connection between culture, language, identity and place. She maintains the link to her Wiradjuri country in the stories told her and passed down by the women in her family. She learnt these stories from old Aunty Ettie...She’d say “come here girl” and you’d sit down and she’d tell you a story.
Gloria is keeper of these stories that tell of the creation of places that hold significance and particular meaning for the local Wiradjuri people (see 2.3.11). Jodie says that the women in her family sustain their cultural role as educators and keepers of knowledge through storytelling. Although Aboriginal men’s traditional warrior role has been eroded by colonisation, women have continued their practice as *educators in keeping the family together, the network*. The women in Jodie’s family have

*influenced me a lot. I see them as very strong people... I’ve been very fortunate because I’ve been given information that has been knowledge for many generations.*

Jane helped organise women’s groups that research Aboriginal history and that keep track of local people’s cultural lineage. Jill also confirms that stories connect identity to the culture of place. She organises Elders to deliver cultural learning so as to assist children reconnect with their Aboriginal heritage (2.3.10). Jill says parents relate how their children come back from the camps telling them about dreaming stories, language, history and culture.

Vandana and South African Project Worker Magamase talked about a community cultural development course they facilitated, comprised of women from Sierra Leon, Sudan, Somali, Congo, Liberia and Zambia. The women asked “*How do we maintain our stories, proverbs, music, dance?*” Vandana explains *music and dance would be part of who they are*. Magamase narrates that the women developed a project idea around the African idea of *Sabana*; middle age women who are neither young nor old, and who are expected to conform in dress and behavior to traditional customs:
There is this group that is in between and they’re normally outcasted [sic] in their community...they would be under surveillance. Everything they do, how they dress...they’re expected to...wear those African clothes even if they don’t want to. So they do not belong anywhere [and] feel like they are just unrecognised...Most of the communities they could identify with it; it happens everywhere.

Melissa believes she is able to impact her community in the relationships developed locally. As an Indigenous writer, Melissa writes and also tells stories, particularly in presentations she gives at the local high school

reading a poem that the kids were rapt in...and I knew that particular poem would get their attention...Then I told them about what I did at Darwin Writers Festival last year...Aunty Hilda Muir; I helped her finish off the book. I just told them her story about being taken away and just the hardship she’d went through and how she ended up. And I used her story...because they hadn’t had the benefit of Aboriginal culture in their own life.

Storytelling also emerges as a method that educates and a process that documents and evaluates, as detailed in the following sections.

3.3.2 Storytelling Educates, Documents and Evaluates

Jodie, Gloria, Vandana, Melissa and Jane identify storytelling as a method that educates. Jodie’s involvement for instance with local community groups stems from a strong sense of her role as an educator
wanting to teach people about Aboriginal culture [because] knowledge is power in Aboriginal culture and knowledge is power in the western system too... Power in Aboriginal culture is based on knowledge. Jodie tells dreamtime stories...to teach our children morals and values... like [the] one about the flying fox who’s got no friends because [of] being mean to everyone...We tell our kids that one all the time. And there’s one about the galah and a little lizard and they were playing with a boomerang and how the galah got permanently changed and he didn’t recognise his brother because one turned into the thorny devil and the other one...changed because they hurt each other and they were hurt for life... Value systems and how they taught them, they taught them through stories...being an educator...Breaking down the barriers...ignorance and the misconceptions ... Education is probably the most important key.

Gloria also says that Indigenous stories teach values and morals. In the interview she sings a lullaby that she also teaches at the local schools: ‘Kind be’...it’s to help them to be good, to grow strong and have good moral values. Gloria is a member of the Wiradjuri Council of Elders, and in this group there is also a group of younger Elders who are trained and are given the

Test of Three...give them a bit of knowledge, you see what they do with it and if they get all puffed up...with self importance, you chop them off, and that’s their learning finished...And the third test is if they’re willing to share that knowledge with the ones under them.

Gloria is finding that people in the
wider community now seem to have more awareness, and wanting to know about anything Aboriginal: Languages, stories, spirituality…What I call the time of awakening, because you’ve got the Dreaming, the Nightmare and this time, seeing it through my eyes, is the time of Awakening happening all over.

Vandana also views making art as an educational process that stimulates inclusive and cross-cultural encounters. People in the western suburbs attending Vandana’s art workshops come from places of deep historical and political division. Making art collectively is viewed as an educational process where participants come to an understanding of their common humanity:

*It’s really been challenging just to get women to come out of that comfort zone to come and meet, talk to another woman from another community and say “Actually we’ve got stuff in common”...So, there’s an educational role in just building those connections and talking and relating.*

Vandana sees that cultural institutions learn from these cross-cultural encounters where

*neither had really met before...That might be one small six week workshop...just to bring them to an arts centre or an art gallery is a whole other level of education for both the centre and the community.*

Melissa practices storytelling with an educational aim that will impact the wider community. She believes that telling *stories are ... absolutely the best way to teach.* Melissa aims for dialogue rather than *telling* people what they should think. She tries *to pierce their everyday experience*
and ...let a shaft of light in, and hopes for an expanded ability to hear what others have to say and...learn to listen. Melissa believes that listening respectfully is also a teaching strategy because responding in that way is more powerful than even what I say in response...respecting their potential to learn.

Jane aims to strengthen cultural identity in her role educating on the impact of colonisation in continuing cycles of violence, as linked to domestic violence. She advocates a holistic approach where programs addressing issues such as drug and alcohol, domestic violence, sexual and mental health are all interconnected.

Deborah and Vandana discussed telling stories as a community arts method that documents and evaluates. Vandana believes it is vital that the community cultural development sector validate its impact, by developing critical theoretical models that will provide systematic approaches to community arts planning and management. She applies the Most Significant Change (MSC) theory, which measures the impact of community cultural projects. The MSC model maps emotional and different types of ways people react in written and digital story presentations. Vandana produced a workbook for CCDNSW Showcasing Diversity: Evaluating Community Cultural Development Projects. The kit culminated mapping she undertook of the Western Sydney cultural landscape, where she found a significant number of cultural workers who needed assistance in documenting their projects. The publication is a six months’ training program that

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demonstrates a Participatory Action Research Model, and provides cultural practitioners with theoretical tools for planning and documenting projects.

Deborah also states that community cultural development can be evaluated by standards of virtuosity, where art is valued in how it is able to move, transform and/or connect. Community cultural development is a process that promotes both social cultural capital, and creative virtuosity. Deborah believes that the participatory arts are evaluated by the level of insight and knowledge forged between different groups in the community that creates social capital. She tells a

wonderful story of a woman that was involved in a project called the ‘Sea grass Story’ which took place in Hastings in Westernport Bay in Victoria in the 1980s and it involved a puppeteer by the name of Ian Cumming and a number of other artists. Ian’s father was a scientist and was concerned about the proposal to allow oil tankers into Westernport Bay, and it was felt that development would upset the very delicate ecology of that bay where the sea grass formed a very important part of the food chain: It was a very significant expanse of sea grass in terms of world ecology. So Ian decided to do this project called the Sea Grass Story, which involved working with members of the community which included school kids to devise a public performance piece on the beach; beautiful puppets and music and the usual kind of thing. And he did that each year over a period of three years and there’s a documentary made of it and there’s a lovely young woman, long red hair. You see her in the beginning and she said “I’m just a housewife” and by the end of that three year process she had become a lot more articulate and a lot more confident. The whole community had become much more aware of this issue. They voted out the pro-development council and voted in a much more environmentally aware council and that young woman
Deborah argues that creative virtuosity can be measured by standards of excellence, where the indicator is the level of how the works move participants and audience that lead to new understandings and insights about the lived experience. In the above examples, Deborah and Vandana independently describe the community arts where telling stories can activate social, political and cultural change. Storytelling therefore emerges as a method informing a critical creative practice that expresses identity. Where the research finds that difference tends to be constructed in the margins of a universalising narrative of Australian cultural identity, storytelling emerges as a method and practice that can blur boundaries of difference.

**Themes Summary**

In this chapter, topics and themes are drawn from interview summaries detailed in Chapter 2. The following outline provides a summary of these topics and themes:

3.4 Marginal Arts

There have been consistent attempts to divest funding for the community arts. This has been in relation to the sector being viewed as too closely aligned to the poor and marginalised at the expense of the middle classes. Consequently, there has been increased responsibility on local government to plan and manage community cultural development. Cultural policy merges ‘art’ and ‘culture’ where funding tends to support the creative industries, aimed at economic growth; and community cultural development intended to forge social capital. Convergence and
partnerships are encouraged with the aim of sharing what is widely regarded as diminishing resources.

The distinction drawn between the professional and amateur arts appears to sustain privileged access to cultural institutions and resources. Difference is constructed in the margins of a universalising narrative of Australian cultural identity. It therefore becomes evident that community cultural development is a policy aimed at stimulating social and economic capital in localities with densities of culturally diverse and low income populations.

3.5 Local government social, cultural management role

Local government cultural planning is widely regarded as complementary to the Social and Community Plan. However it is apparent that statutory funding authorities nevertheless shape arts and cultural programming. Incentive funding is more likely to be granted where there is demonstration of investment in local and regional cultural industries.

Increased emphasis on local government to manage community cultural development is due to the authority’s perceived proximity to grassroots arts and cultural aspirations. There is broad agreement that culture does not require to be mandated due to reliance on key individuals to identify and instigate local community arts and cultural projects. It is apparent that key individuals have developed capacity to navigate a complex arts and cultural bureaucracy where they are more able to access funding. It is also evident that local government reliance on key individuals to instigate and maintain local arts and cultural programs, tends to reflect ideals of a unified Australian cultural identity.
3.6 Storytelling, cultural identity and cultural activism

Storytelling emerges as critical creative method and practice that expresses cultural identity. The role of women in particular is highlighted in the transmission of knowledge as related to place. Storytelling emerges as a method that documents and evaluates, and a critical creative practice that expresses identity in relationship with place. This creative practice can blur boundaries of differences, constructed in the margins of a totalising narrative of Australian cultural identity.

The thesis argument beginning to emerge from this chapter is refined in the following two chapters, in the context of reviewed literature and applied theoretical paradigms.
CHAPTER 4 Creative Constructions

The following two chapters comprise the thesis argument. Participant interviews were interpreted and analysed, guided by the gestalt method (see 2.2). The thesis argument begins to emerge in the previous chapter from topics and themes drawn from individual summaries detailed in 2.3. This chapter refines the thesis argument in the context of reviewed literature and applied theoretical paradigms, introduced in Chapter 1.

Throsby (2006) asserts that cultural policy in Australia has generally been viewed as arts policy. Mills (2006) writes that the terms ‘art’ and culture’ are applied as interchangeable and synonymous in policy documents (2). Rowse (1985) illustrates that this dualistic logic is founded on aesthetic values separating subsidised art as superior to popular culture, marketed as commercial entertainment. Hawkins (1993) defines the community arts as a bureaucratic invention founded on social democratic and cultural pluralist ideals, where funding is advocated to facilitate ordinary people’s access and participation in cultural engagement. A key objective for funding the arts has also been the creative expression of national identity (xviii). Hawkins applies a constructionist analysis to illustrate embedded meanings in discourse that have come to signify the community arts (xxi). Shifting arguments for funding the arts, and the internal tension within the Australia Council over the sector’s uncertain status and legitimacy (xxiii), have contributed to ambiguity over what is meant by ‘community’ (xviii). Hawkins also describes an aggressive welfare campaign advocating the principles of community empowerment that identified local government and multiculturalism as two areas of priority (78). This has been the
catalyst for the Australia Council’s transition of the community arts to community cultural development.

This study finds that shifting and conflicting arguments for public funding of art and culture, continue to disguise implied aesthetic values, social ideals and economic objectives. Rhetoric supporting social democratic and cultural pluralist ideals instrumental in founding the Australia Council’s community arts program, explains the prevailing perception of the sector’s affiliation with the cultural fringes. The devolution of the Australia Council’s community arts to increased responsibility on local government to voluntarily manage community cultural development is legitimised by the view that the authority is most proximate to their local communities. However it is apparent that state and federal funding authorities nevertheless shape local and regional arts and cultural programming, with the aim of growing social and economic capital.

The following section demonstrates the prevailing perception of the community arts alignment to the cultural fringes, and that this has been at the expense of the wider community. Consequently, funding for the community arts has been devolved to increased responsibility on local government to plan and manage community cultural development.

4.1 Artistic Virtuosity and the Cultural Fringes

Participant interviews confirm that shifting arguments in relation to funding the Australia Council’s Community Arts program, have contributed to the sector’s uncertain status and legitimacy. Deborah for example cites the efforts made by Barry Cohen, Federal Minister for the Arts in Bob Hawkes’ administration, who wanted to abolish the Community Arts Board because he thought it was too political. She says that in the 1990s and in the beginning of the 2000s, the
community arts have been perceived as being too closely aligned to the cultural fringes at the expense of the broader community;

*the official policy became narrow and limiting...only certain kinds of practice were seen to be legitimate community cultural development, [having the effect] of alienating [many practitioners] who felt [that] their work was no longer being recognised as legitimate.*

Deborah undertook a scoping study in 2005\(^1\) for the Australia Council, where she interviewed 150 people from the community cultural development sector. The study showed how community arts and community cultural development (ccd) has always been a highly contested sector, with no definitive description of the practice. She believes that the current upheaval in CCD policy has occurred because of the change in perception that creativity be accessible to all and not limited to the poor and marginalised. Deborah says that mainstream art’s criticism of community artworkers is that only those who have limited artistic ability have been working in community cultural development because there’s nowhere else for them to go.

Hannah also believes that the sector was being restricted to specific cultural groups at the expense of middle class access to resources, prior to the Australia Council’s shift from Community Cultural Development to Community Partnerships. She explains

*I was in the Northern Beaches of Sydney. We could not get money. For love or money, we could not get it because we were seen to be in a well-heeled part, elite area. And we*

weren’t working with [the] élite. We were working with all kinds of far from élite members of the community. In community arts practice directly. Very hard... And unfortunately the whole policy directive for most grants has become so politically correct, which means that if you’ve got Aboriginal content and can demonstrate that, and get the letters of support ... or people in regional areas in remote or disadvantaged situations, you’ve got a bloody good chance of getting money...Absolutely huge resentment, and for good reason.

However Lesley says the Australia Council is getting a fair bit of flack to cover them feeling guilty about dropping the Australia Council’s Community Cultural Development Board. It was such a blatant thing to do with no community consultation, resulting in Arts NSW now being the key player. Lyndon also says that dissolving the Australia Council’s CCD Unit was a mistake even though the community arts sector has had bad press of its own making. Vandana concurs that the Australia Council has allowed the CCD sector to slip away, in that they didn’t want to look at it anymore. She says the dissension over the decline shocked people within the Australia Council. I don’t think they were expecting this kind of backlash from people.

Vandana indicates that funding bodies keep changing titles, and that this reflects changes in cultural policy. Michael’s interview demonstrates this shift in language, signifying a transition in ideology rationalising arts funding. He explains that CCD and ‘multiculturalism’ gained traction in the 1980s with governments, that triggered significant growth and support.

It started out as community arts in the ‘70s, evolved in the ‘80s community cultural development [which] is presently being transformed by the Commonwealth Government into community partnerships; a new language for CCD. Community cultural development
broadened that and said “Well, there’s a whole range of activity. It’s about working with the community to enable them to develop their own projects and develop their own approach to the kind of culture that they would like in their region and something that was specific to their region and was expressive of their region.”

A strong perception surfaces from the above interviews in relation to the alignment of the community arts with ethnic enclaves, as a motivating factor for dismantling the Australia Council’s community arts program. Deborah for instance discusses the political debate about Australian traditional values that has been divisive and that has the effect of marginalising minority groups. She says community cultural development practice has challenged the assumption that there is one national identity. She maintains that the sector is founded on an underlying ethos that there are many identities that make up a nation, and as an individual you can belong to many different communities. Regional Arts NSW has undergone a huge transformation since the 1980s, with the dismantling of the cultural elite who traditionally ran the Arts Councils, to community involvement in the development of their own cultural resources and expression. It therefore becomes apparent that political maneuvering has contributed to devolution of the community arts to local government management:

*When McKinsey’s Management Consultants were brought in by the Australia Council to review the Australia Council’s structure, they recommended the abolition of the Community Arts Committee and the devolution of funds to local government. They argued that community arts was not a federal government responsibility, it was a local government responsibility...What we’ve seen most recently with the Australia Council is an attempt to completely knock off that entity.*
It is therefore evident that dismantling the Australia Council’s community arts program is in relation to the sector’s perceived affiliation with the cultural fringes. A report commissioned by the Australia Council (2006) for instance, finds that CCD as an expert professional practice, has been marginalised from the broader arts and cultural industry:

*The ability to embrace a range of arts and cultural activities in communities has been limited by the narrowly defined parameters for supporting community cultural development activities* (Australia Council for the Arts 2006:7).

The report recommends that the sector broaden out to be recognised as Community Arts and Culture, because the practice should be described by language which views community arts as belonging to all people for greater status in local communities.

This research concurs with Hawkins’ (1993) analysis of the internal inconsistencies within the Australia Council contributing to the ambiguity over what is meant by the term ‘community,’ and the continued uncertainty of the community arts sector’s status and legitimacy. Current public discourse advocates broadening the community arts to wider mainstream representation, due to perception of the sector’s affiliation with the cultural fringes. Local government is identified as most proximate to the community, which is the reason for increased responsibility on the authority to plan and manage community cultural development. This theme is examined in the following section.
4.2 Local Government CCD Planning and Management

The previous section discussed the prevailing view of the radical alignment of the community arts with the cultural fringes, which explains the persistent attempts to dismantle the program. Local government is identified as most proximate to representing the community, and therefore expected to voluntarily commit to planning and managing community cultural development.

Lois and Hannah confirm the expectation on local government to support and fund regional arts and cultural initiatives. Lois works with and is funded by the seven Northern Rivers local governments who make up the managing Regional Arts Board (RAB). Hannah is also reliant on membership fees paid by local government that funds half the Arts OutWest programs. Bruce confirms payment of membership fees to Arts OutWest in promoting local community cultural activities:

*It’s a contribution that we put in and they [Arts OutWest] go and publicise and give Oberon some presence as they do with all the other regional groups.*

Interviewed arts and cultural policy managers generally concur that culture does not require to be mandated, due to reliance on ‘the community’ to identify and realise its own arts and cultural aspirations. Local government is therefore expected to voluntarily commit to cultural planning which is widely regarded as complementary to the compulsory Social and Community Plan.
For instance Lesley is categorical that local government cultural planning should not be mandated
due to Bathurst Regional Council’s long standing ethos that local groups determine their specific
understanding of what ‘culture’ is, and how it is expressed.

Michael explains Arts NSW cultural policy where ‘the community’ drives local arts and cultural
initiatives:

_The community has been arguing for the arts in local government for decades...Arts NSW’ underlining strategy is to integrate cultural development into community development, and work with those councils and those communities who want to do that; to encourage them._
_You can’t force anyone to become involved in the arts. It is up to the local community._

Michael believes that the current voluntary local government cultural planning and management
process works efficiently. While agreeing with David Throsby, Chair of the NSW Arts Advisory
Council, that Australia should develop a national cultural policy, Michael also believes that the
process needs to have an established broad consensus that reflects community aspirations. He
describes the change in emphasis of the community arts, which in the 1970s was about working
directly

_with the community...There’s a change if you like. Community arts was very hands on. It was about getting in there with the community and doing things...Community cultural development found an enormous fertile ground in local government across Australia._ And

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one of the reasons the whole understanding of community cultural development is changing is that in the ‘80s and ‘90s, it was to a very large extent driven by the Australia Council and the state arts authorities, and now it’s increasingly driven by local government to the point where I question the degree to which it is necessary for us to be involved in that area.

Increased expectation on local councils to voluntarily plan and manage community cultural development is rationalised by the prevailing view that local government is most proximate to grassroots arts and cultural aspirations. Michael describes a defacto national cultural planning process that has been evolving since the establishment of the Australia Council and the Cultural Minister’s Council. As a result, the aim of Arts NSW policy is to encourage local government voluntary cultural development as part of the compulsory social and community planning process.

However Lesley has a different interpretation of the voluntary nature of local government cultural planning. She says that although the Social and Community Plan has been made compulsory,

the [State] government hasn’t been brave enough to actually legislate on Cultural Planning... They’ve legislated in 1999 to make local government actually work with its community to develop a Social Plan, which I always think is a really fascinating conversation; that Local Government which says that it’s the tier of government closest to its community, had to be forced to do planning on community services.

Rhetoric in support of local councils as most representative of ‘the community’ therefore appears to disguise complex political maneuvering. Deborah for instance notes that she wrote the
Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government (2004), which she says was managed by organising

*a reference group of people in the sector whose contribution was quite considerable, because I wanted to make sure that it was real and that it met their needs.*

However Lesley gives an alternative explanation to the writing of the Cultural Planning Guidelines:

*It took them a long time for those cultural planning guidelines to actually be developed. And the way that they were developed was through NSW Ministry employing someone, and they wrote the guidelines and then LGSA got hold of them and said, “We don’t like it.”... rewrote them until there was a final agreed document...*

Lesley states that the Department of Local Government funded a Local Government and Shires Association (LGSA) Cultural Officer to work with councils across the state to

*take on the role of cultural planning...Some people will just ignore LGSA totally because they think they don’t achieve anything; a purely political creature which gets stuck in the mire of politics...The role of the LGSA is meant to be a peak body who speaks on behalf of councils across NSW...We all have different wants and likes and needs...different communities. And so there’s always been the concern that it’s been difficult for any one*
individual council to lobby government and get what they want. So the classic thing is create a body who will lobby on your behalf. But that then assumes that they’re going to know all about what it is that you want, and I’m not sure that always happens. That’s just the way that LGSA works. Again, it’s a very political process.

Increased expectation on local government to voluntarily plan and manage community cultural development is legitimised by the view that the authority is most proximate to local arts and cultural aspirations. However it is evident that state and federal authorities nevertheless shape local and regional programs. Grants and incentive funding is most likely provided for projects that demonstrate social and economic outcomes. This theme is explored in the following section.

4.3 Funding Shapes Community Cultural Development

As detailed in this chapter, there has been a shift in funding the community arts from state and federal responsibility, to increased expectation on local government to deliver arts and cultural outcomes, as related to local and regional social and economic development. However it is apparent that state and federal authorities shape local and regional cultural programs with incentive funding made available on completion of local government Cultural Plans.

For example, Lesley says state and federal funding is now being made available for local governments who have got a Cultural Plan in place. Lesley also talked of resentment when cultural programs need to fit funding criteria, rather than developing projects identified by the local community because you end up shaping a program to fit whatever grant monies are available. Lesley prefers that untied grants are made available, which suggests that in spite of the
rhetoric about local government as most representative of the community, funding authorities shape local and regional arts and cultural programs.

Bruce concurs that federal and state funding has not matched the increased demand on local government to invest in cultural infrastructure. He says that with a population of over 3000, Oberon is a small country town that cannot provide cultural services such as theatres and galleries that major regional cities Bathurst, Orange and Dubbo have built. Grants are an important source of funding that finance services to the community. Council is allocated a set amount of Commonwealth funds administered by the state, which over time has diminished:

_We get financial assistance grants, which every council in Australia gets from the Commonwealth Government and it’s fed through the State to us. And there’s a certain program and a formula which determines where your shortcomings are and where you’re disadvantaged, and you get an allowance figure within the stats and then it’s a multiplying effect on your population, or your road length, or the number of timber bridges you’ve got...It’s harder to get things done without getting grants of some description and it’s so complex. The grant...you really have to know how to put it together, and you can’t afford to not cross a ‘t’ or dot an ‘i’ otherwise you’re wiped...The other grants we get are standardised grants._

Deborah confirms the view that state and federal authorities have shifted costs to local government while expecting social and economic outcomes from local government, without providing adequate resources to support a commensurate growth in infrastructure:
With rate pegging, local councils have been unable to keep pace with the growing costs of service delivery. And those costs have grown, partly in a response to cost shifting by federal and state government who required local government to do more and more and haven’t given them the money to do it. And also because of the infrastructure that local government has to maintain. It wasn’t until the new Local Government Act…brought in the early 1990s in NSW, that Local Government was required to develop an Asset Management Plan, including everything from buildings and sea walls to park benches and trees and community centres and libraries. This process has highlighted how difficult it is for many councils to find the money to maintain their asset base.

Michael says that local government voluntary cultural planning aims to identify specific cultural projects. Local councils who have undertaken the cultural planning process have gradually made substantial investment in the arts services provided to the local community. This investment includes libraries, museums, galleries, public halls, community arts facilities, neighborhood centres and youth centres. Up to a thousand applications are received each year for Arts NSW grants, fellowships and awards, which Michael asserts is a form of cultural mapping and scoping in building long term relationships with certain local governments.

However Lesley believes that state and federal authorities have increasingly shifted costs to local government, expecting an increase in responsibility for arts and cultural development:

The LGSA pushed the cultural planning guidelines [to the Department of Local Government]… what they did was they gave LGSA funding...and they had a Cultural Officer who worked in Local Government and Shires Association and the intent of that
position was to work with local governments to get them to plan for cultural services in their local government. Again it’s almost a state cost shift. So you had state governments saying to local government shires “Here’s some money. We want to give you an Officer who will go out and help local government take on the role of Cultural Planning.”

Bruce also stressed the importance of grants to fund services to the community, but that local councils can be overridden by state government who have power because they can bring in legislation under the guise of acting for the common good... The Local Government Act is an Act of State parliament. If they repeal that we don’t exist [and there] is nothing under the Constitution that recognises local government.

Michael however says that Arts NSW does not drive a cultural agenda, in that cultural development is driven by community identifying gaps that are articulated in funding submissions. However he does point out that statutory authorities prefer local government to undertake the voluntary Cultural Plan. Incentive funding is available as encouragement to invest in cultural infrastructure such as galleries, museums and libraries. Lesley also identifies galleries, libraries and museums, which make up the region’s cultural industries, as statutory funding authorities’ cultural priorities. As a result Bathurst Regional

Council has spent a fair bit of money in terms of infrastructure and effort in the cultural scene over the years, in particular attempting to strengthen the museums sector.
The next section explores how funding authorities direct local and regional cultural development, aimed at social and economic outcomes.

4.4 Convergence and Partnerships

As discussed in this chapter, devolution of the Australia Council’s community arts to increased responsibility on local government to manage community cultural development, has been in relation to the authority identified as closest to representing the community’s art and cultural aspirations. However it becomes evident that state and federal funding authorities direct local government funded arts and cultural programs, where there is increased expectation that local councils demonstrate expanded understanding of ‘culture’ as an integration of social ideals and economic imperatives.

Literature points to ‘art’ broadened from aesthetic references, to a density of social and economic indicators. Frow & Morris (2000) for example explain that ‘culture’ in the 1980s began to be debated in the Australian media as a complexity of social customs, values and expectations (315). Deborah demonstrates how the meaning of art has broadened from aesthetic references to incorporating social ideals:

*If you ask people “What do you think about the arts?” people will say “what do you mean?” or “That’s not for me, that’s for rich people.” If you say to them, “What do you do? Tell me about what you do?” They’ll go “Look, it’s just a little thing I do in the shed. You know, I make furniture...I knit baby clothes or I do quilting, or I embroider. I’m in a*
Deborah demonstrates how ‘culture’ integrates social ideals and economic objectives, in how she applies community cultural development principles so as to give people an insight into their own understanding of culture. What it means to them and how they might apply this understanding to how they plan...with communities...I develop their confidence and their competence in understanding what the cultural implications of their actions in local government might be. And I try to argue that everything that local government does has a cultural impact of one kind or another, whether that’s recognised or not... [for instance] approving a shopping mall with no active street frontage...will destroy the small businesses,

leading to a decline in strip shopping. Therefore Deborah supports emphasis in cultural policy on local communities identifying their own arts and cultural aspirations as supported by government:

*Regional Arts NSW has undergone a huge transformation since the 1980s where the whole thrust of their initiative is to involve members of local communities in the development of their own cultural resources and cultural expression, and to see that recognised at all levels of local government.*

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94 A strip mall, also called a shopping plaza or mini-mall, is designed as a neighbourhood unit, which is an open-area where stores are arranged in a row with a sidewalk in front. Retrieved 26 June 2011 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strip_mall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strip_mall)
Michael illustrates this increased expectation on local councils to demonstrate an expanded understanding of culture that embraces social and economic objectives. He says

you will get some councils that are very progressive, and you’ll get other councils which are not necessarily against the arts. It’s just something that they haven’t got involved in. There hasn’t been a group of councilors, or the council simply hasn’t come under any expectation that they should provide resources in this area.

The expectation that local councils demonstrate an expanded understanding of culture incorporating social ideals and economic objectives, is met with various interpretations. For instance Deborah says that some local councils

feel that they have to do a Social Plan because that is mandated, and if they just whack a bit of culture in there, that’ll be fine...The Local Government and Shires Association developed a paper on the economic situation of local government in NSW. The paper drew a distinction between maximalist and minimalist councils. Minimalist councils were roads, rates and rubbish. Maximalist councils were concerned with other issues like social, cultural and environmental. And I think that these distinctions have been interpreted by conservative elements within government as meaning that roads, rates and rubbish is critical and everything else is kind of optional. Which I think is a very retrograde step.

Bruce confirms this point, saying that he does not see cultural planning as a core function of what we were asked to do. Bruce does not believe there is a need to make cultural planning mandatory, which is a question of how much interest is within your community to get involved. He agrees that
the (2004) Social and Community Plan identified the need for a multi-purpose community hall which Council doesn’t actually believe there’s a great need for... What’s the income stream to generate from it to continue to pay for it? He points to the local RSL as an alternative, because it provides adequate community facilities in that it costs you nothing... don’t have to hire it. They just provide it, and they make money out of selling drinks and food.

Hannah and Lois also reveal variations in local councils’ understanding of community cultural development. Hannah says that although the larger councils do see their role as subsidising an aspect of the smaller communities’ cultural development, not all councils are supportive and that’s been a bit of a sore point for us. Should be embarrassing for them, but that differs.

Lois also gives an example of a local council spending

$2 million a year cutting the grass in its sports field, but that same council is reluctant in putting money into supporting arts infrastructure.

Although local government is expected to deliver social and economic cultural outcomes, Michael concurs that each council varies in priorities. Consequently there tends to be uneven metropolitan community cultural programming:

Willoughby Council is about to spend over $100 million on a new civic and cultural centre, which will be the largest project of its kind in NSW when it proceeds. And when you go into the detail of what some of the North Shore councils are doing, you find that they’ve been very proactive at a certain community level in cultural development, but not cultural
infrastructure. In fact I can think of a number of councils on the North Shore where theatres have simply closed down in the last ten or fifteen years when they shouldn’t have. Councils like North Sydney should be, not necessarily owning several theatres, but should be facilitating the existence of a group of theatres, and a group of galleries, and a group of a whole range of facilities for its community.

Michael confirms that Arts Northern Rivers has provided a blueprint to government authorities on how to develop regional economic growth that will have a flow on social impact. Arts Northern Rivers has received Arts NSW funding to draft a creative industries strategy for north eastern NSW. This strategy may create a model for other regions experiencing rapid change and growth such as

*Broken Hill but many other communities in Australia* [that] *have to deal with change from rapid decline to rapid growth. Broken Hill’s population declined dramatically, but nevertheless the city was able to turn its economy around to the point where it is a major outback tourist destination. It’s a place where people make films. It has a marvelous new gallery: It has one of the oldest collections in the country. It has several museums. It has something like two hundred people in the town who make a living out of painting pictures and making things. It has a series of festivals and it has a tourist industry, which keeps the motels full.*

Therefore, Arts Northern Rivers is highlighted as successful in converging and brokering partnerships, resulting in the growth of extensive regional cultural capital. However Lois credits her success in attracting funds to an already established regionally based arts and cultural
network. She has been successful in linking these groups in community partnerships where resources are shared. Lois says that the regional Festival and Events Network she organised was like joining the dots. She brought together regional arts organisations, which enabled them to work as an integrated region. She assisted the Network to identify a common issue such as audience and marketing. Lois then compiled a report detailing marketing and audience research data from these festival and event organisations, and this document provides a snapshot of where audience comes from and the marketing strategies used to reach them.\(^\text{95}\)

Although Lois is supportive of a creative industries strategy, which is about developing an economic base from the arts, she also maintains that it is difficult for communities to access the same level of government funding in geographical areas where a professional arts industry is not already established. She credits her success brokering these partnerships, due to the already established creative industries operating in the region. She says that she has been able to attract funding because statutory authorities aim to address high unemployment due to

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\text{a massive population explosion happening. There's four thousand new people moving to this region every year. } [\text{However}] \text{ if you are in some region where there is hardly any arts activity, then if you want to get money for economic development there, you need to look at agriculture or niche food or whatever.}
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Michael says that the Community Partnerships strategy is a debate that will continue to evolve and influence cultural development over the next 3-5 years. He explains current cultural policy is a very high level of cooperation between all levels of government such as Regional Arts

Australia, the Australia Council and state arts authorities, who all work together on changes occurring in community and cultural development. All levels of government are responding to the arts industry, while at the same time providing leadership and incentive for growth and change.

Lesley explains this position in the context of the cultural accord between the Department of Local Government and the Local Government and Shires Association, which focuses on what they’re calling convergence, where cultural groups such as libraries, museums, galleries and archives work more closely together.

The study shows that devolution of the Australia Council’s community arts program has increased responsibility on local government, due to proximity of the authority to grassroots arts and cultural aspirations (3.2 Local Government and Economic Cultural Management Role; 4.5 Aesthetic Values, Social Ideals and Economic Objectives). However it is apparent that state and federal funding authorities nevertheless shape local and regional arts and cultural programs. Incentive funding is available for local governments that demonstrate investment in cultural infrastructure and projects that build social capital.

4.5 Aesthetic Values, Social Ideals and Economic Objectives

As discussed, current cultural policy legitimises funding the participatory arts as instrumental to building social capital, as well as advocating professional creative skills development aimed at local and regional economic growth. This section illustrates how the term ‘culture’ disguises
aesthetic, social and economic meanings in targeting concentrations of populations constructed as disadvantaged and/or dysfunctional.\textsuperscript{96}

The study finds that broadening the meaning of culture to an integration of aesthetic, social and economic meanings, disguises ambiguity in relation to what is meant by ‘community’ and ‘culture.’ For example Rowse (1985) finds a dualistic logic embedded in Australian cultural policy that advocates public funding for excellence, as distinguished from popular culture marketed to the masses as commercial entertainment (1.3 Art and Culture: Aesthetics, Ideals and Economics).

As discussed, the devolution of the Australia Council’s community arts to increased responsibility on local government to plan and manage community cultural development, appears to be in response to affiliation of the community arts with the cultural fringes.\textsuperscript{97} Therefore local government identified as closest to ‘the community,’ is expected to deliver community cultural development programs aimed at building community; while simultaneously investing in the cultural and creative industries that will grow local and regional economies.

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\textsuperscript{97} For example, Hawkins (1990) notes that, “In the search for the culturally disadvantaged the term ‘community’ was extremely convenient. Its ambiguity allowed for the identification and multiple constituencies for community arts projects. Prisoners, children, migrants, women, the aged and those living in isolated regions were a few of the many groups targeted. Basically anyone who wasn’t white, male and bourgeois could be defined as culturally disadvantaged ” (15).
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Cultural policy identifies the community arts as instrumental to building community, distinguished from the professional arts, recognised as integral to the cultural and creative industries. Raised expectation on local government to demonstrate expanded understanding of ‘culture’ is in relation to embedded aesthetic values, social ideals and economic objectives in government policy.

Interviewed participants demonstrate inherent aesthetic values, social ideals and economic objectives embedded in cultural policy. For example, Hannah advocates the community arts as a process that builds community, while simultaneously promoting the creative industries that grow the economy. She explains that the community arts is rarely about art, it’s usually about the arts being an aspect of community development which non-Government and volunteer organisations see as important to their service delivery. Hannah supports the participatory arts as facilitating social capital. She lists a number of successful regional projects because they’ve got their audiences and they’re all volunteers not relying on an income. Lithgow for instance has a long standing musical society, and I think that sense of belonging characterises these sorts of groups in regional arts, which Hannah says builds community and also articulate local identity. Hannah also sees her role as developing artists’ skills designed to maximise economic value for creative output, that will attract paying audiences. Hannah views her role as activating cultural change in explaining to ordinary people that they are consuming an arts or creative product whenever they listen to the radio, go to the cinema or watch a movie. In her position as Regional Arts Development Officer with Regional Arts NSW, she advises individuals and groups with the aim of building capacity and
skills...and that’s why I go out and run grant writing and professional development workshops [that] build knowledge and networks around community arts practice.

Margie also distinguishes her community arts work from her professional arts practice. As professional artists, the aims is to make the

*best piece of theatre we could...because...it makes the story more real...you make as good as possible theatre [that] strives for the best piece of work you can make... to engage the community.*

Margie’s newly created Performing Arts Producer\(^98\) position is a tripartite collaboration between Bathurst City Council, the Australia Council Theatre Board (Community Partnerships),\(^99\) and Arts NSW. This new position is examined in the context of devolution of the Australia Council’s community arts, to increased responsibility on local government to manage community cultural development. Margie’s position is one of three created out of the restructure of the Australia Council’s Community Cultural Development Board, to Community Partnerships. She is responsible for administering up to $50,000 to assist in the development of community arts professional practice. She explains this initiative which

*will allow us hopefully to unearth people who might actually have an interest or be musicians or visual artists, who could actually really benefit from this project, or some*

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funny guy who everyone has always thought has the potential to be a comedian. It’s an
unearthing process as well. A development process I would hope.

However Lesley demonstrates the dichotomy inherent in cultural policy that promotes
community creativity instrumental to growing social capital, while simultaneously aiming for
economic outcomes. She says the community arts are

about that process. It’s not about what the final product is. If it’s terrific, it’s great. If it makes money, great, all well and good. But in that process of creating that product, there’s some really good things that create strong community fabric if you like, all along the way. And I think that’s really important...feeling safe enough to go and expose yourself to do something that might be perhaps a tad not so good. You might not have the art work that’s as good to hang at the art gallery, but you’re comfortable about hanging it in a community space. I think that’s good.

Lesley also expresses frustration with expectation from state and federal bodies that local
government deliver on cultural economic outcomes:

It seems to be that there’s a very strong desire for government now that if it’s not economically contributing, then it’s not valuable to support. There’s lots of emphasis coming through now: If you’ve got a cultural industry how much is it worth to us? How many dollars is it bringing to your community? How much tourism does it create on an annual basis? So there’s lots of strengthening emphasis now on your statistics, your attendances as in how many dollars is it bringing into the city, how many beds does it fill, if
you have that sort of event, that sort of thing attached to it. So for the cultural industry and the economic benefits of it, I think there’s becoming a much stronger need to understand and emphasise it. I think it’s more important to look at what’s happening when you make something, like that process. It could be an actual shocking piece of product, but the person and the process to actually create it is really important. Whereas what we’re doing now, we’re going in to an environment which I think is focused on that final product, and the quality of it and how much is it going to bring in for your organisation or into your city.

Deborah explains the shift in emphasis in the community arts to professional skills development. She says that virtuosic art can be assessed by how work is able to move, transform and/or connect:

...there is a way of defining virtuosity according to different criteria in various genres and cultures...Virtuosity is very important in community cultural development whether making art for social change, a way of individual expression or to create a sense of community and solidarity. The work must have that capacity to move, transform and connect to other people’s experiences and help imagine what is possible.

Deborah therefore defines the community arts as aiming for virtuosity as achievable, in how artistic excellence engages participants and audience in a process of community building, where the familiar is seen in a new light. 100

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100 Deborah’s publication *Art and Well Being* (Mills and Brown 2004) showcases community arts projects that exemplify these principles.
The study finds that discourse implies meanings that disguise aesthetic values, social ideals and economic objectives (3.1 Marginal Arts). It is evident that cultural policy highlights the community arts as instrumental to building social capital, distinguished from the professional arts constructed as integral to the creative industries aimed at economic development.

Vandana describes the change in emphasis which occurred during her time with the Australia Council’s Community Arts Board. Funding then was made available for mentoring and traineeship programs that supported younger people coming through. However, when she returned to the field in 2000 she noticed that the CCD sector felt it had become more professionalised...and bureaucratic. There was a requirement for CCD workers to attain training accreditation, where previously there was opportunity to initiate and fund programs that addressed identified gaps in the sector. Vandana maintains that before culture was shaped by economic rationalism, community arts funding was more flexible in how

it allowed some structures to develop in the community...a lot of things happened for Australia that were really significant...cultural action like popular theatre... Having spoken to other people working in this sector, it tends to be political.

Vandana cites Urban Theatre Projects’ ‘Back Home’ as a successful community arts initiative which was picked up by the Sydney Festival, and now in the next Sydney Festival there’s going to be another community based theatre project. She identifies Urban Theatre Project as an example of the community arts as cultural action. Deborah on the other hand, views Urban Theatre Project as a prime example of professional arts development. She cites FILEF, the Federation of Italian workers who sponsored
work by Denis del Favero. I saw his name the other day. He’s a photographer and visual artist. We (the Board) provided some money to bring in a young trainee writer who went on to become a professional writer...The Community Arts Board as it began, was motivated by a commitment to give people the access to resources to express their own creativity. And in the beginning, in the early days in the 1970s when the Board was a Committee of Council (1975 it was created)...it dealt with a whole range of stuff. It dealt with Community Art Centres; festivals. It co-funded the establishment of the Community Theatre Program with Theatre Board, that led to the establishment of groups like Flying Fruit Fly Circus and West Community Theatre and the Murray River Performing Group and so on, that have now of course evolved into groups like Urban Theatre Projects and so on. I think that what I’m trying to say is, it had a very broad policy approach. It was very flexible and very responsive.

Deborah says that the participatory arts aim at community participation in expressions of cultural diversity:

I think that we need to challenge the assumption that there is one national identity. In community cultural development there’s been an assumption that there are many identities that make up a nation, and as an individual you can belong to many different communities. So I guess it really is a view of cultural pluralism versus a cultural monolith.

However evidence from analysis and interpretation of participant interviews, suggests cultural policy disguises implied meanings in community cultural development rhetoric. In effect
populations constructed as disadvantaged and/or dysfunctional are targeted for social and economic remedial attention, which is examined in the following section.

4.6 Local Vernacular Cultures

As discussed above, cultural policy simultaneously advocates the community arts as instrumental to building community, developing professional creativity aimed at growing the economy, while distinguishing artistic virtuosity as separate from popular culture, marketed as commercial entertainment. Cultural policy is therefore viewed as implying social ideals, economic objectives and aesthetic values, contributing to persistent ambiguity over what is meant by ‘community’ and ‘culture.’

Tulloch (in Hawkins 1993) describes how discourse disguises meanings, which this study attempts to reveal in applying a gestalt method (see 2.2) guiding analysis and interpretation of participant interviews (1.4.1 Storytelling: Arts-Based Research Method). It therefore is argued that Australian cultural nationalism is an ideal which privileges select individuals’ access to resources and cultural institutions, as determined by power differentials such as race, class, gender and age (Hawkins 1993:v).

The study finds that the Australia Council’s funding for the community arts has been dismantled due to the perception of the sector’s affiliation with the cultural fringes (4.1 Artistic Virtuosity and the Cultural Fringes). As Hawkins (1993) demonstrates, conflicting ideologies in

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support of funding the community arts have contributed to the sector’s uncertain status and legitimacy, with continuing ambiguity over what is meant by the term ‘community’ (xviii). A response to the community arts perceived affiliation with the cultural fringes has been devolution of responsibility to local government, recognised as most proximate to representing ‘the community’s’ arts and cultural aspirations. There is also raised expectation that local government demonstrate expanded understanding of ‘culture,’ incorporating social ideals and economic imperatives, which this study argues targets populations constructed as marginal, and therefore disadvantaged and/or dysfunctional.\(^\text{102}\)

Bruce and Lesley illustrate expectation on local government to manage community cultural development aimed at building social capital. Bruce acknowledges that there is an option to develop a cultural plan incorporating crime prevention that links in with the Social and Community planning phase. Lesley also cites a cultural program she helped design that aimed to address young people vandalising property with graffiti.

The study suggests that selected localities are targeted for remedial attention, where community cultural development is a strategy intended to grow social and economic capital. For instance Michael indicates

\(^{102}\) The research attempts to scrutinise language applied to institutional discourse that can reveal embedded power relations that produce public policy. For example D'Cruz (2001) draws on the constructionist theories of Foucault and Bourdieu to illustrate the theoretical context of this study in relation to language that disguises power relations. Reviewed literature in particular Rowse (1985) and Hawkins (1993) also provide evidence of shifting rhetoric in relation to funding the community arts that disguises implied meanings and conflicting ideologies.
communities west of the Divide where you have communities with declining populations, or communities like Newcastle or Wollongong who have had to completely transform themselves. They were old industrial sea port towns and over the last twenty years have had to transform themselves. One of the catalysts for economic change has been cultural development and community cultural development.

Michael suggests that localities requiring community cultural development are identified by income status, and contrasts these populations with localities that are aesthetically superior, due to artistic and cultural production:

There are some very well established and quite prosperous metropolitan councils that do very little in the cultural area. And they do very little partly because their ratepayers are quite happy with the status quo... It’s taken many of the councils on the North Shore a long time to become involved in the cultural area, and in relation to some of the leading regional centres. This may be because people there feel they can have access to culture without assistance from their councils, by driving across the Bridge, going overseas or making their own arrangements. There isn’t that sense that they need to look to their council and to their community for cultural resources...Next door to a council with a very proactive cultural program, you may have a council that has relatively little for the simple reason that the ratepayers feel they can just get in the car and drive into town.

Wealthy suburbs not requiring publicly funded community cultural development programs are distinguished from localities with densities of low income, Indigenous and ethnic populations.
The study suggests that these populations are targeted for community cultural development programs intended to grow social and economic capital.

Margie, Vandana, Nyree, Hannah and Lois’ interviews support the view that community cultural development aimed at building community and growing local and regional economies, target identified disadvantaged and/or dysfunctional populations. Vandana describes participants in her visual arts community workshops as coming from the western suburbs and from places of deep historical and political division. Nyree’s community arts workshops tend to be with Indigenous drug and alcohol rehabilitation groups, the disabled and elderly. She explains that she is required to meet social and health funding submissions criteria, tailoring her community arts workshops to work with the elderly, disabled, prison inmates and drug and alcohol rehabilitation patients. Nyree says and we’ve also found at Orange, people have come there with mental health issues.

Hannah cites an example of a locally based Indonesian born classic dancer who came as a refugee to West Australia...got into the Australian Centre for Performing Arts, went to Melbourne, formed a dance group and has contributed to fringe and other festivals in the region.

Vandana argues that ‘multiculturalism’ is now labeled ‘emerging communities:’

\[\text{We’re working with refugee communities coming here all the time. People are coming even now as refugees, and the communities are changing depending on where the wars are and the refugees are coming from...They’re the emerging communities...They’ve come from all} \]

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103 At the time of interview (28 August, 2006) Vandana was the Cultural Diversity Program Manager with CCDNSW. She was in the process of finalising several projects prior to her position being made redundant (see Volume B, p 203) which supports the thesis premise in relation to funding dismantled for the community arts.
kinds of war-torn situations and I’ve heard things like “Oh, we’ll have an Emerging Communities Program for three years, and once that’s over, that’s it, because those communities have finished emerging.” Well it doesn’t work that way.

Interviewed participants also demonstrate evidence of a distinction made between cultural minorities, from the wider community (3.1.1 Scripting Difference as Marginal). It is therefore evident that those who differ from commonly held Australian values are identified as problem populations. For example as discussed in Deborah’s interview, although media inferred that Moslems had come in from the western suburbs during the Cronulla riots, the locality is also comprised of Lebanese Australians. Deborah says

That may be so. But certainly if you feel you have no place, if the coppers pick on you because you look Lebanese, if every time you walked down the street with your friends, you get stopped and searched you start to feel marginalised. If you leave school when you’re fifteen because there’s no culture in your family or community which reinforces the value of education, you know you’re staring down the barrel of a pretty grim time.

Therefore perceived variation from a typical Australian value such as education, marks responsibility for exclusion. Shifting and often contradictory rhetoric advocating funding the arts, continues to distinguish ideals that normalise a common heritage, as distinct from difference framed as marginal. It is evident that local projects tend to reflect values implied in images of a shared national cultural heritage. Bruce for example describes a number of locally driven projects

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104 Giannacopoulos (2006) cites media reports of the 2005 Cronulla riots described as ‘mobs of youths chanting racist slogans and carrying Australian flags’ who attacked the ‘youths of Middle Eastern appearance’ (Sydney Morning Herald 11/12/05)
which preserve heritage and historical sites, as initiatives coming from the community in that they feel that there’s a need. He names key locals who drive these projects, volunteering their time and donating their own resources.

Deborah also describes the prevalence of key individuals who instigate projects that tend to reflect idealised images of a unified national Australian identity (3.2.1 Community Driven Cultural Development):

*I suppose it depends on who’s running the town...Traditionally, the arts were seen as the prerogative of an élite, and it was very much for the nice middle class ladies. To them [it was] something to do. So they ran the Arts Councils and they were kind of the Queen Bees of culture in their community.*

Lesley supports Deborah’s point about key individuals driving local arts and cultural initiatives. She says that Bathurst does not follow the usual local government process of linking cultural planning with the Social and Community Plan, due to local key players and drivers who know how to lobby the councilors [and] get what they want. Michael relates

*I have watched motivated community groups completely change the status quo in their respective communities and councils regarding the need for cultural facilities, projects and activities; persuade councils that were firmly against the construction of theatres, galleries and arts resources to change their minds and carry out ambitious projects running into many millions of dollars... Dubbo has a twenty year history of community groups arguing for a cultural centre and theatre which was largely resisted by the council until recently.*
They are about to open one of the largest and best cultural centres in country NSW at a cost of approximately $8.5 million to refurbish and extend the old Dubbo High School, with a gallery, a museum and a community arts centre, where any and every arts group in that town will have space to meet and do whatever they want to do. And at the same time, have made an in principle decision to build a new five hundred seat theatre for an estimated cost of $17.5 million.

As discussed in this chapter, the general consensus why culture does not need to be mandated is due to the prevailing view that local government is responsible for voluntarily and spontaneously realising ‘the community’s’ arts and cultural aspirations. Participant interviews however illustrate that local councils rely on key individuals to identify and initiate community arts and cultural projects. It is also evident that these projects tend to reflect established expressions of local cultural identity, where innovation can be vigorously opposed. For example Bruce says

*it takes a while in a small country town...people sit back and watch and wait, until you show your true colors. You’re either genuine or you might find out that this person’s just here for their own pocket, and they’re not really interested in the community at all. And the community then will turn on them...the Kowmung Music Festival came in here...they got each other off side early on, making some comments in the media that were really shooting themselves in the foot. So they didn’t really get too much support from the Council thereafter.*

Margie also says that in her experience, new ideas can flounder when resisted by local cultural gatekeepers who can prove *when a community doesn’t feel like they’ve invited someone, then*
you’ll get resistance. Lesley also expressed frustration with the local government process that can become distracted by particular councilor’s dominating views, rather than representing the common good which

*can be the most irritating thing about local government... For me local government is about representing all of your groups, not just about representing one or two, and that’s really important.*

As the study illustrates, the rationale for dismantling the Australia Council’s community arts program is in relation to the perception of the sector’s affiliation with cultural minorities, which has been at the expense of the wider community. Local government is identified as most proximate to representing community arts and cultural aspirations. As discussed, evidence points to raised expectation that local government apply community cultural development strategies aimed at social and economic development. Populations with densities of social and economically disadvantaged populations tend to be targeted for remedial attention. For instance Margie cites community arts workshops where she develops performances in physical theatre, puppetry, hip hop, R&B with at risk youth in detention centres. She says these people have been seen as not

*having worth really blossom through the arts. Lebanese boys that we worked with were physical theatre focused. So I was teaching them stilts.*

Margie also cites a project she was involved in funded by the Department of Education and Training, for artists to work with the Tennant Creek Indigenous community. She says that her
own learning curve has been huge going in communities. Her experience mentoring a NIDA trained local Indigenous artist was life changing in how much Margie learnt from

an Aboriginal woman who is a local woman. The best outcome would have been for her to end up running that project. But for whatever reason, she did not, and now there’s a non-Indigenous person in that role, but at least it’s still happening.

It is therefore apparent that community cultural development programs aimed at growing social and economic capital in targeted populations, can restrict opportunities for participants but assist facilitator artworkers career trajectory. For example Lois says that what is happening in the Northern Rivers and most likely

all over the country is that one of the ways that Indigenous communities are doing arts practices is through CDEP....TAFE or through adult community education [where they] come out the other end, but there is no support. So then they just stop, and don’t continue. Some of them keep practicing but most of them just stop. To my knowledge, there are no Indigenous artworkers anywhere in regional NSW. I just think that is a massive issue. There needs to be people all over the state working with Indigenous communities to develop professional arts; arts in business, micro-business development as well as just arts projects which are about community building and capacity building.

Lois advocates both the creative industries and community cultural development as viable models that can address non-representation of Indigenous artists in the mainstream arts and cultural sector. However, she also says that the Arts NSW forum she and Cathy Henkel attended
was a creative industries discussion, but I also really emphasised that that’s not the whole picture, that’s just one aspect of it. I just think we have to always advocate for art’s sake and also for art for community sake... as well as [the] creative industry side of it.

As discussed, the general consensus why culture does not require to be mandated is due to reliance on local individuals to identify and realise art and cultural projects. There appears to be a trend that these projects sustain idealised expressions of a common national identity, proving resistant to change and innovation. Lyndon for instance supports the view that localities express particular vernacular cultures, in that creativity comes from identifying and articulating the specific culture of place. In his view, creativity comes from having a vision how to innovate outdated ways of doing things. He believes that organisations should raise private money rather than being completely dependent on government funding, because the barriers to realising projects is very rarely about money... just thinking about what you do. Lyndon proposes a model of entrepreneurship that allows scope for arts and cultural diversity. Innovation in his view comes from the ability of arts and cultural organisations to raise money, with the aim of promoting projects that connect people to place, and that determines the kind of creativity that will come from that locality.

**Summary**

The study finds that devolution of the Australia Council’s community arts to increased responsibility on local government to plan and manage community cultural development, appears
to be in response to a perception of the sector’s affiliation with the cultural fringes (4.5 Aesthetic Values, Social Ideals and Economic Objectives).

The thesis argues that increased responsibility on local government to voluntarily deliver arts and cultural programs, is due to the authority’s perceived proximity to grassroots arts and cultural aspirations (3.5 Local Government Social, Cultural Management Role; 4.2 Local Government CCD Planning and Management; 4.3 Funding Shapes Community Cultural Development; 4.5 Aesthetic Values, Social Ideals and Economic Objectives). Local government is expected to demonstrate expanded understanding of ‘culture’ as an integration of social and economic imperatives (4.4 Convergence and Partnerships; 4.5 Aesthetic Values, Social Ideals and Economic Objectives; 4.6 Local Vernacular Cultures), where community cultural development programs will build social capital that simultaneously demonstrate investment in the cultural and creative industries aimed at growing local and regional economies (4.5 Aesthetic Values, Social Ideals and Economic Objectives).

The research finds that local councils tend to support key individuals in the production of art and cultural projects that tend to reflect idealised images of a shared national cultural identity, where difference is marginalised (3.2.1 Community Driven Cultural Development). Community cultural development programs aimed at growing social and economic capital appear to target localities with high concentrations of disadvantaged populations105 (4.6 Local Vernacular Cultures).

The thesis also finds a general consensus that culture does not require to be mandated due to reliance on ‘the community’ to identify and realise grassroots arts and cultural aspirations (3.2.1 Community Driven Cultural Development; 4.2 Local Government CCD Planning and Management).

The theme raised in this chapter in relation to evidence of established local vernacular cultures, is explored further in the following Chapter: *Story: Telling Cultural Identities*. The next chapter identifies cultural activism as a critical creative method that can disrupt idealisation of a national Australian identity, where difference is labeled as peripheral and requiring remedial attention.
CHAPTER 5 Story: Telling Cultural Identities

Chapter 4 explored inherent meanings in Australian cultural policy shown to refer to aesthetic values, social ideals and economic objectives. This examination indicates that due to the perceived affiliation of the community arts with the cultural fringes, which has been at the expense of the mainstream community, the Australia Council’s funding of the community arts has been dismantled. Devolution of responsibility for community cultural development planning and management to local government, is in relation to the view that local government is most proximate to representing ‘the community’s’ arts and cultural aspirations. The general consensus is that culture does not need to be mandated due to key individuals realising local arts and cultural projects. However the study finds that those established vernaculars cultures are supported that reflect idealised images of a shared cultural solidarity, proving resistant to difference. It is apparent that community cultural development programs aim at social and economic outcomes, targeting densities of low income, Indigenous or ethnic populations, identified as disadvantaged and/or dysfunctional.

This chapter identifies cultural activism as a critical creative practice, where storytelling can innovate established vernacular cultures of place that tend to reflect idealised images of a unified Australian national identity. Vandana gives an example of a community arts project that challenged negative mainstream stereotyping of an ethnic group. The community cultural development project in which she collaborated with TAFE and the Australia Council, comprised fifteen women from African communities including Sierra Leone, Sudan, Somali, Congo, Liberia
and Zambia. The training was designed to support refugees, and address the needs identified by the women in relation to their fragile communities. The course aimed to take

women from isolation and bring them together [showing participants how] to convert an idea into a proposal, how to write a proposal, application, funding, budgeting and also communication.

The expected outcome was that the women would become facilitators in their respective communities. The course assisted the women to

identify the needs of the community, and then develop that idea into an artistic project...through music, dance and drama.

On completion of the course, participants were awarded a Statement of Attainment for Employment and Education Opportunities. Vandana views this initiative as a career path in continuing the women’s cultural work. She says that in her experience, community cultural work

happens very slowly...any cultural work...takes at least ten years to really connect with the community and you need stability...It’s about relationship building.

Therefore storytelling is identified as a method that informs a critical creative practice, described as cultural activism that disrupts the tendency to marginalise difference as peripheral to an idealised Australian mainstream. This theme is discussed in the next section.

5.1 Cultural Activism

The research identifies cultural activists as artists who tell and make stories that transmit knowledge and meaning, where feeling is a catalyst for thinking. The following participants are described as cultural activists in how they tell stories that expand thinking in feeling that potentially disrupts institutional practice of erasure.

Nyree identifies as an Indigenous (Gamilaraay) visual artist who paints about the Stolen Generations. Her work is generally of faceless people because their faces were taken as their identities were. Nyree says it is important to her that people who buy her paintings show that they ‘connect’ and ‘feel’ what she is trying to say, as her paintings are a visual connection for non-Indigenous people to understand and empathise with the Stolen Generations

because too many people say “they should get over it. Why don’t they get over it? Why don’t they get on with it?” No. People need to know why it’s difficult to get on with it.

Gloria teaches Wiradjuri language stories and songs to the local schools and also in the jails across the Central West. She escaped the government removal policy because of her fair skin, and she views her appearance as a positive factor in that
there was no danger of us kids getting taken away...some knowledge was passed on to me
and it’s a joy for me to be able to pass some of this knowledge to the younger ones coming
up.

Gloria says Bathurst was named after some Lord Bathurst over in England. However the
Indigenous people know all of the Bathurst Plains [as] Batriguu. She tells the creation story of
Waluu known as Mt Panorama, believed to be an extinct volcano because before these events
happened, it was a flat place. Two brothers fight over a woman who chooses the younger good
hunter brother. The older brother is angry and kills his younger brother whose blood soaks into
the ground making it tremble and spew out flames, with the land rising up to form Waluu. The
angry brother is killed by flying ashes and his body becomes Mt Pleasant. Waluu means ‘to
watch over’ and when young men were causing trouble they’d be sent up to Waluu, to move the
problem on and where they could reflect on what they’d done wrong... also they’d be given a job
to see who was coming and leaving Wiradjuri:

We share that place with a lot of other people particularly at racing time...awful things
happening at the Mount...there’s been occasions when Wiradjuri people have had to go up
there and do what we call ‘fix up’ to re-balance the energies there.

As discussed in the previous chapter, ambiguity over what is meant by the term ‘community,’ has
contributed to the uncertain status of the Australia Council’s community arts program. Current
cultural policy advocates broadening the sector to wider mainstream representation, where it
appears that difference is constructed in opposition to an idealised mainstream. Interviews with
creative practitioners point to artists who aim for cultural change in applying a critical creative
practice that can disrupt how difference is labeled and stereotyped. Cultural activists tend to disrupt stereotyping difference as peripheral, as cited by Jodie who describes her work with the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative (3.1.1 Scripting Difference as Marginal; 3.1.2 Cultural Activism). Melissa identifies as a writer, and her arts practice is defined by this study as cultural activism (3.3.2 Storytelling Educates, Documents and Evaluates). Storytelling and making informs a critical creative practice defined here as cultural activism. Feeling as a catalyst for critical thinking, has the potential to innovate how difference is stereotyped as marginal to an idealised mainstream community.

Cultural activism that tells and makes story in image, word, song and dance is described as a critical creative practice that can blur boundaries of difference. Ruth for example talked about her experience working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who must make an effort to fit into the local Bathurst community. She admits that it can be difficult for people from non-English speaking backgrounds to penetrate the township socially. Although of a predominant Anglo Celtic character, Bathurst is also comprised of people from over forty-five non-English speaking cultures. Ruth talks about her membership of the established community choir which generally sings a western classical repertoire, and in which she is the only ethnically diverse member. She understands from her own experience the difficulty for people from a strong aural tradition approaching this choir, as she only joined herself after persistent encouragement by the visiting Hungarian musician who instigated the choir at the Charles Sturt University. Ruth explains that this choir approached her because of her role as Migrant Support Worker. She was requested if there were people from an ethnic background who would like to join them for a night

\[\text{Ruth (2007)}\]
in the lead up to the 2000 Olympics torch coming through Bathurst, and the Multicultural Friendship Choir was initiated from this event.

As discussed in the previous chapter, cultural policy implies aesthetic values, social ideals and economic objectives. The community arts perceived affiliation with the cultural fringes, are now supported in relation to growing social and economic capital, particularly with populations identified as disadvantaged and/or dysfunctional. However, even though Ruth recognises that her Multicultural Friendship Choir offers people who would find it difficult to connect with established mainstream groups, she is not motivated by reasons to assist individuals who may be experiencing social isolation. Instead she says it is the simple pleasure of enjoyment of singing with others that is the reason for her activating and sustaining the group. Ruth’s role facilitating this group is viewed as cultural activism, as it holds potential to disrupt the tendency to label difference as peripheral to an established mainstream community. Storytelling as a feature of cultural activism is described as a critical creative method, that is explored in the following section.

5.1.1 Stories, Culture, Identity and Place

The previous chapter describes how cultural policy tends to imply aesthetic values, social ideals and economic objectives tending to target populations identified for remedial attention. This chapter describes storytelling as a critical creative practice that can disrupt tendency to script difference as marginal to idealised cultural expressions of a unified national identity. Jodie for instance tells stories of the relationship between culture, identity and place. She says
the land is connected, the stories are connected, everything is connected and that is why it’s so hard for non-Aboriginal people, because they’ve always gotta break things down and put ‘em in their little boxes... and that’s why in terms of being an art practitioner, I want to break down them barriers.

Jane also believes that stories told in dance and music strengthens pride in children’s Aboriginal cultural identity (3.3.1 Storytelling and Cultural Identity). Nyree confirms how storytelling in song, image, word and dance affirms pride in Aboriginal cultural identity. She explains

We were asked to work on a project with Aboriginal girls in Year 9 who were dropping out of school...One girl just did Cowra, because that’s her, that’s where she lives, and that’s what she painted. The color of the earth, which is a Cowra color...it’s like yellow ochre.

Gloria says that the need for an Elders Council was in response to Native Title being put on by mining companies...that we needed to have a voice...because there’s very significant places and the physical evidence of archaeologists hold more importance, instead of realising the significance of story, of song, of sense of place. As a Wiradjuri Elder, Gloria represents the Wiradjuri communities when mining companies addressing the Native Title Act are required to negotiate with traditional owners. However, she finds it impossible to deal with their dissection of land, which traditional stories and song sustain as complete and whole, because she says you can’t separate language, identity, culture...It’s who you are.

Tere also demonstrates how stories in song and dance express culture that connects identity to place. She teaches local children in Bathurst dance that tells a particular story (3.3.1 Storytelling
and Cultural Identity). Jill confirms that identity is an interconnection of culture and language to country told in story. She explains that she was born in Bathurst and describes her cultural connection to country: *My grandfather is Wiradjuri but I am Ngiyampaa by birth, by my mother’s line. I am Ngiyampaa.* The cultural content of the youth camps Jill has been involved in organising for over twenty years, is always delivered by Elders from localities such as Booral, Bourke, Brewarrina, the South Coast, Central Coast, Gilgandra and Bathurst. The reason why the camps go so far is

> because it’s about reconnecting kids with their Elders in their home communities, because our kids come from quite a large cross section.

Lyndon also aims to tell stories that help local communities to connect with the culture of place. He does not believe that the traditional model of touring shows necessarily reflects local peoples’ experience. Instead he aims to create performances that identify the specific culture of a place; creating work that really reflects that so people understand the connection to where they live (3.3.1 Storytelling and Cultural Identity). He believes that showcasing new works in the media gives local people connected to that work a

> sense of pride where they live, about who they are and about the sort of art, if they would use that term, that they make.

Lyndon’s idea that Australian identity is a kaleidoscope of myriad specific cultures of place, resonates with Indigenous respondents’ views about storytelling as an expression of identity that connects to place.
This chapter highlights storytelling as a critical creative practice that can disrupt an imagined view of a unified Australian cultural identity. The following section highlights the role of women as storytellers, who connect identity in relationship with place.

5.1.2 Women Storytellers

The following creative practitioners define the role women play in telling stories that link identity in relationship to country. Jodie illustrates how women in her family sustain a connection to country in their traditional cultural role as storyteller educators and keepers of knowledge. She says that her aunty Joyce in her ‘80s

\[
\text{knows all of our history... we knew a lot of stories about this area because she would tell us... It’s part of our family history... It’s for my children too. I want to empower my daughter as well.}^{108}
\]

Gloria also maintains the link of her cultural identity to Wiradjuri country in the stories told to her by the women in her family and that she passes on (3.3.1 Storytelling and Cultural identity). Gloria sees her role as keeper of these stories that tell the creation of places that are of significance and hold particular meaning for the local Wiradjuri people. The following story Gloria tells in our interview illustrates a continuum of traditional knowledge connecting culture, language and identity to country.\(^{109}\)

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\(^{108}\) Jodie’s great great grandmother was removed from her tribal lands in the Wellington area during the government forced removals of the late 19th Century. This was during the gold rush period and pre dates the Aboriginal Protection Board as documented in Peter Read’s ‘The Hundred Years War’.

\(^{109}\) See Gloria’s Interview Transcript, Volume 2 Part B (pp103-120) for extended stories.
Gurrungutj and Mirrigan

Gurrungutj is a Spirit of the water like the Rainbow Serpent who formed the caves known as the Jenolan caves. Gurrungutj was laying at rest down in the Wollondilly River at a junction of a meeting of two waters, Wollondilly and Cox Rivers, when a Gundungurra warrior called Mirrigan from the Quoll clan decided one day that he was going to try and catch him because he’d make a wonderful feast for all the people and he’d gain status by doing this...He sent his spear into the body of the great serpent and all he managed to pull out was a piece of his flesh. Gurrungutj rose up out of the water...like a big rainbow and then he dove deep, deep down into the earth...pulling all the trees and bushes with him and the waters from the water hole filled that track which is now the Wollondilly River. Gurrungutj followed by Mirrigan, continued into the limestone belt of the south...towards Oberon...Gurrungutj went further west...slithered along the underground making beautiful crystals in the caves...When you look at these crystals under the light you see his rainbow colors. Gurrungutj finally gets to Djulandu (that’s where we get the name Jenolan), where a big fight happens, but Gurrungutj escapes and he went back into the limestone caverns once more. So today if you go through the Grand Arch at Jenolan Caves and the Devil’s Coach House...you’ll see a great wall of rock which is Mirrigan’s ammunition. It makes you wonder whether Gurrungutj is still down there making more caves, maybe because he’s a spirit of the water.

Vandana also illustrates how the cross-cultural practice of women as storytellers connects identity with the culture of place (3.3.1 Storytelling and Cultural Identity). Vandana identifies as South Asian, and the monsoon project was with her own community of women from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka which allowed some way of actually talking about migration as well. She also explored color with these women, where turmeric, apart from being a food and
clothing dye, also has deep spiritual significance. This theme of women as storytellers expressing identity in connection to the culture of place, also resonates with Lyndon’s view about Australian identity as a kaleidoscope of myriad specific cultures (3.3.2 Creative Industries and Community Cultural Development; 5.1.1 Stories, Culture, Identity and Place).

As discussed in the previous chapter, shifting arguments advocating public funding for art and cultural development, has led to continued ambiguity over what is meant by the term ‘community.’ As demonstrated in the previous chapter, conflicting rhetoric in relation to funding the Australia Council’s community arts, has contributed to the sector’s uncertain status and legitimacy. The devolution of responsibility to local government managed community cultural development, is viewed in context of the perception of the affiliation of the community arts with the cultural fringes. Projects aimed at cultural action have been viewed as politically charged. Therefore current cultural programming appears to target identified populations for remedial attention. The previous chapter also explored a general consensus that culture does not need to be mandated due to local government’s reliance on key individuals to realise grassroots arts and cultural projects. However the study suggests that these projects tend to reflect idealised expressions of a unified Australian cultural identity. This chapter examines cultural activism as a critical creative practice that can disrupt construction of difference as marginal to idealised expressions of Australian national identity. The following section explores cultural activists in roles of leadership, education and/or facilitation.

5.1.3 Leader, Educator, Facilitator

The previous chapter discussed how cultural policy promotes funding community cultural development as instrumental to building social capital; and professional skills development that
contributes to growing economic capital. As a result, community cultural development programs tend to target populations identified as marginal and who require remedial attention. However, this chapter describes cultural activism as a critical creative practice that can disrupt labeling marginality in opposition to an idealised mainstream Australian community.

Cultural activists are described as enacting roles of leadership, education and/or facilitation that disrupt tendency to stereotype difference as peripheral. For example, Vandana, in her role as artist facilitator, aims to make art collectively that will allow people to come to an understanding of their common humanity (3.3.2). Jodie views herself as an educator in telling stories that break down ignorance and misconceptions (3.3.2 Storytelling Educations, Documents and Evaluates), and Melissa also tells stories as a teaching strategy aimed at social and political change (3.3.2). Gloria’s role as educator is also illustrated with calls she gets from local people who find artifacts like an old axe head or a grinding stone. She is asked whether she wants to come and pick them up, but she advises “No, Leave it where it is. You are now caretaker for that object and for the place you are on.” Because if you take things away, it upsets the balance of the place.

As detailed in the previous chapter, current cultural policy promotes programs designed to grow social and economic capital. Although Arts Northern Rivers has provided government funding bodies with a successful creative industries model that advocates convergence in funding partnerships aimed at regional economic development, Lois is emphatic that creativity in cultural policy should not be restricted to a singular pursuit of economic development. She says

*art that is critical, political, visual, film that provides social criticism or is cutting edge or is at the opposite spectrum and is about communities coming together and is important for*
the community and social aspects, rather than for the actual art work produced; that sort of arts activity is really important as well... it would be cultural death for the nation to expect that all art would work from a business point of view. There is a need for community cultural development everywhere [but funding] art for art’s sake is pretty small in this country... if you want your community to be healthy, then you have to facilitate participation in culture and people’s ability to express their culture through the arts.

5.2 Summary

This chapter describes cultural activism as critical creative practice that features storytelling as a method, where feeling is a catalyst for expanded thinking in the transmission of meaning and knowledge in song, dance, word and image. The role of women as storytellers who connect identity in relationship to place is highlighted. This practice also creatively expresses plurality in an otherwise implied unity. Cultural activists enacting roles of leadership, education and/or facilitation, aim to disrupt how their identity is mediated as peripheral to an imagined ideal of a unified Australian national identity. A proposed view of the collaborative arts emerges as the potential to express the specificity of culture of place that comprises a kaleidoscope of Australian cultural identity.

The final chapter sums up the thesis argument examined in the above two chapters, and proposes application of storytelling as an arts-based research method and practice.
CHAPTER 6 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the thesis with a review of the key themes. Chapter 1 examines the context in which the community arts sector is formed as a bureaucratic invention. The sector is seen as produced by policy that advocates social ideals and cultural pluralism in the creative expression of Australian identity. A principle argument instrumental in founding the community arts has been that art be broadened from elitist connotations, to wider social engagement. As Hawkins (1993) argues, shifting and conflicting positions in relation to public funding for the community arts has contributed to uncertainty of the sector’s status and legitimacy (pp 183-184: 188: 211-212: 233).

The push to expand art from aesthetic values to social ideals coincided with global economic shifts occurring in the 1980s. Consequently in Australia, cultural policy linked creativity with economic development in amalgamating information technologies, communication and the arts that comprise the creative industries. As a result of attempts to broaden cultural practices to social and economic indicators, the thesis finds that the term ‘culture’ has come to refer to a conglomeration of albeit distinct sets of aesthetic values, social ideals and economic meanings. As the UNESCO 2002 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity contends, this has given rise to specific and unique cultural expressions threatened by imperial global practices, veering towards homogenisation (p 17-18).

There is general consensus expressed by interviewed participants, that culture does not need to be mandated due to the proximity of local government to voluntarily and spontaneously represent
‘the community’s’ art and cultural aspirations. However the thesis finds that local government tends to rely on key individuals to identify and realise local arts and cultural expressions. The thesis finds evidence that self-appointed key individuals activate projects that tend to reflect idealised images of a shared national cultural identity (3.2.1 Community Driven Cultural Development).

This study defines vernacular cultures as the collective expression of identity in relation to place. That is, culture is a creative expression of the people who identify and are linked to the specificity of place. However, it also becomes apparent that these local vernacular cultures can prove resistant to difference (4.6 Local Vernacular Cultures). The research demonstrates how a unified semblance of Australian national identity can be expanded with story telling and making that expresses the multiplicity of identities in relation to place.

6.1 Arts-Based Narrative Research Method

The thesis applies a gestalt method influenced by Hollway and Jefferson (2000). In this paradigm, inconsistencies and contradictions are significant aspects of research (see 1.7 Narrative Interview Method). For example, the study highlights how the term ‘multiculturalism’ is viewed as marking difference, while at the same time the term indicates government policy that advocates the emergence of ethnic enclaves into a defined mainstream (4.1 Artistic Virtuosity and the Cultural Fringes). This contradiction is again apparent where the community arts sector is viewed as a platform for activating cultural action, while simultaneously promoted as a model for professional arts development contributing to the cultural and creative industries (4.5 Aesthetic Values, Social Ideals and Economic Objectives).
This study is influenced by theories guiding how power relations embedded in ideologies produce public policy. As Williams (1976) demonstrates, meanings can be revealed in language that is opened up to scrutiny. For example, analysis of the bicentenary finds divergent views from those that tend to dominate the discourse regarding this milestone in Australian history (pp 158-159). Further investigation could attempt to understand the significance of this historical event to Indigenous Australians in what appears to be mainstream indifference.

Analysis of interview data in the context of theoretical paradigms and reviewed literature, demonstrates that community cultural development as a model that promotes social ideals, tends to target populations of ethnic difference and social and/or economic disadvantage. As discussed, Hawkes (2001) argues for a shift from cultural emphasis on economic objectives, to advocating cultural action developed by government methodologies. These would feature creativity as significant to social and environmental sustainability (1.4 Local Government: Community Social and Cultural Planning). Interviewed Community and Cultural Development Consultant Deborah agrees with Hawkes’ argument that culture not be limited as a sub-set of social policy or reduced to a triple bottom line (see Chapter 2.3.2). Deborah describes the community arts (Mills & Brown 2004) where creativity is interpreted in the broadest sense of diverse knowledge making and value systems. These are articulated in collaborative projects utilising a range of arts and media (6). Scott Rankin, founder of Big hArt, also aims to re-define the community arts with theatre shows such as Ngapartji Ngapartji intended to teach and preserve Aboriginal language.

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110 D’Cruz (2001) illustrates how scrutiny of language applied to institutional discourse can reveal disguised power relations (18-22).
Although it is evident that there is broad variation in defining collaborative creativity, the study takes the position that the collaborative arts express an aesthetics of culture, defined as storytelling and making.

This research proposes storytelling as a method that informs the practice of cultural activism. This method is identified as having the potential to activate new ways of thinking, where feeling is a catalyst for the transmission of meaning and knowledge in the creative arts. I cite Dart & Davies (2003) who illustrate storytelling as a cross-cultural, sense-making process familiar to all people (1.5 Arts-Based Research Method and Practice). Barone and Eisner (1997) also describe storytelling as an arts-based narrative approach, highly accessible to outsiders. This supports Lyndon’s idea of Australian identity as a kaleidoscope of myriad specific cultures of place, also significant to non-Indigenous collective creative practice (5.1.2 Women Storytellers).

The narrative arts include but are not confined to literature, music, dance, singing, theatre, film, performance and the visual and digital arts. The thesis argues that these narrative arts encode knowledge and meaning deciphered by the senses or feeling (emotion) as a catalyst for critical thinking. Cultural activism is therefore defined as a practice that reveals rather than as a form of creative expression confined to a reductive idea of representation (5.1 Cultural Activism). For example Slattery (2003) provides examples of an arts-based research method that can deconstruct identities in the creation of a unique visceral experience (p 23).
6.2 Cultural Activism: A Critical Creative Practice

Chapter 3 discusses the emergence of collaborative arts practice described as cultural activism. Cultural activists are identified by a critical creative practice of telling and making stories that can innovate idealised expressions of Australian cultural identity. As cited earlier in the thesis in support of key points on cultural practices, Perkins and Lynn (1993) argue that Indigenous art reduced to ethnographic functionality, negates an aesthetic sensibility outside a contemporary context (xi). Artists are identified as cultural activists for example, in presenting land claims through the use of the visual and performing arts as testimony to land custodianship.\footnote{Indigenous stories which confirm identity as connection to country as claim to land was legally recognised in the Ngurrara Native Title determination at Prinini, November 8, 2007 (Ngurrara: The Great Sandy Desert Canvas. A South Australian Museum traveling exhibition).}

Millis (1973) explains that the underlying ethos of cultural activism is to decentralise the artist celebrity co-opted into an economic model of production, so that the creative act of collaboration is of more significance than the status of the artist facilitator (1.4 Local Government: Community Social and Cultural Planning).

The research finds that although individuals may not necessarily identify as cultural activists, the practice of story telling and making can disrupt and innovate dominant meanings. In Chapter Five, Nyree for example, is identified as a cultural activist because she paints story in her images intended to trigger people’s response to the Stolen Generations (see 5.1 Cultural Activism). Gloria’s interview also shows that her community creative practice can be described as cultural activism. Gloria sees her role as keeper of the stories that tell of the creation of places that are significant and hold particular meaning for the local Wiradjuri people. The Gurrungutj and Mirrigan creation story Gloria relates, gives an alternative interpretation of local landmarks (5.1.2...
Women Storytellers). In this light, her storytelling is viewed as a critical creative practice that gives meaning in the telling of story, connecting identity with place. In this chapter, Gloria along with Jodie and Vandana also illustrate the theme the thesis examines in relation to the role of women as tradition bearers who transmit stories that connect identity with place.

In support of this position, the chairperson of the Sierra Leone Women’s Wan Word Association Fatmata Mansaray writes:

*Story telling is important in our culture. Spoken language and song is important to us. This project remained faithful to the spoken word, recording women’s stories and songs so that through a CD, the voices of Sierra Leonean women are kept alive. But this project also importantly recognises the need for written documentation, so that our children and their children do not lose a sense of where they have come from. Identity is very important for Sierra Leoneans, especially because what has happened to us. We are still separated from our families; many remain in the refugee camps in Guinea, struggling to survive every day.*

The thesis shows that Indigenous traditional practice emphasises in particular, women’s role in the transmission of knowledge in the telling of stories that connect identity with place. However it is also apparent that storytelling is a significant non-Indigenous practice for cultural activists who enable collective creativity as leaders, educators and/or facilitators. Storytelling as a cross-

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cultural practice is also highlighted in one of Vandana’s cultural projects (p 177).

A definition of the collaborative arts emerges where stories tell and make culture that express identity in connection with the specificity of place. It is also a contention of the research that Australian identity is a kaleidoscope of myriad specific cultures of place, in creative renewal where difference is given voice.

6.3 Summary of the Conclusion

The community arts sector is found to be a bureaucratic invention, supported by rhetoric advocating social ideals of cultural pluralism and broader engagement of ordinary people in creative expression. As a result, there is a prevailing perception that the sector has privileged the fringes at the expense of the mainstream.

There is general consensus among the interviewees who form the basis for the interview data presented in the thesis, that culture does not require to be mandated due to the proximity of local government to grassroots arts and cultural aspirations. Consequently, there is increased responsibility on local government to plan and manage community cultural development.

Although local government is viewed as representing ‘the community,’ it is apparent that state and federal funding bodies influence local and regional arts and cultural programs. There is expectation from these government authorities, that local government demonstrate expanded understanding of ‘culture’ that integrates social ideals and economic drivers. However it is found that local government tends to rely on key individuals to realise grassroots arts and cultural
aspirations. It appears that this reliance on key individuals tends to sustain local cultural expressions that reflect idealised images of a unified national Australian identity. It is also evident that social and economic cultural programs target identified populations for remedial attention. This study identifies cultural activists in critical creative practices informed by storytelling methods that express the multiplicity of identities in relationship with the specificity of place.
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Stories tell culture, connecting identity with place: Australian cultural policy and collective creativity

VOLUME 2 Part A

APPENDICES

Elizabeth Slottje

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Western Sydney
2009 ©
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1.1 Arts/Cultural Policy Manager Interview Schedule

Interview Areas of Enquiry
The following areas of enquiry will be addressed in interviews using types of questions as set out below:

1. Job Description
   - What is the title of your position?
   - How would you describe your role?
   - How long have you been in this position?
   - Who funds your position?

2. Policy
   - Describe the policy which funds your position.
   - Would you describe your role as hands on or more about policy development?

3. Funding
   - Are you responsible for making decisions regarding funding or making recommendations for funding applications?
   - What are the significant factors you look for when assessing applications for funding?
   - Which groups are typically funded (e.g. sport, recreation, arts etc.)?

4. Culture/Community
   - What is your definition of ‘Culture’?
   - How would you define ‘Community’?
   - What is your charter in terms of cultural planning and implementation?
   - List those organisations for which you are responsible, or with which your position is associated that fall into the following categories: the arts; education and training; communications; public affairs; public facilities; history and heritage; environment; recreation and leisure; sport
   - Which of the organisations that you have listed would you consider to be ‘community’ groups?
   - Which of these groups are not ‘community’ groups?
   - How do you distinguish those groups which are community and from those which are not?
   - Which of the above list are cultural and which are not?
   - How do you determine which groups are cultural and those that are not?
   - Do you see member well being as being a function or by product of any of the listed groups?
   - If so, which of the listed groups play a part in member well being?
   - What specific aspects of the groups engender well being?
   - List organisations where the community individuals/groups you are involved with interconnect?
   - How do these organisational structures operate (e.g. Monthly meetings, Newsletters, social functions etc.,)
5. **Personal Vision Statement**
   - Are you satisfied with the operational aspects of your position, or do you have an ideal of developing your sphere of planning and influence?
   - If so, how would you state this as a personal Vision Statement?
   - What are the barriers to realising this vision?
1.2 Arts/Cultural Policy Manager Transcripts

I. Lois Raw Transcript

Lois Randall, Regional Arts Development Officer
Interview recorded at Arts Northern Rivers Office
Alstonville (NSW) 15 May, 2006

E: I am with Lois Randall at Alstonville, this is Kolinda Gallery and it’s Monday 15 May 2006. Lois is the Regional Arts Development Officer for Northern Rivers.

L: Yes

E: Lois, how would you describe your role?

L: Basically, my role is to work with the 7 local governments that make up the Northern Rivers; the 7 Councils and with a whole range of community organisations; firstly to develop programs responding to the needs identified by the community, and then to implement that program which is all about Community Cultural Development. Basically we’ve developed 3 Strategic Priority areas which are Community Cultural Development, Creative Industry Development, Indigenous Cultural Development, and Cultural Tourism. So we’ve got a range of Regional Programs and initiatives under those headings as well as just responding to and supporting queries and projects that come up from the community.

E: o.k. So do you work alone mostly in this, or do you have a team?

L: We have a team. So I’m the Regional Arts Development Officer and the Executive Officer, Cath Fogarty is the Project Officer – we’re both full time, and we have a 3 day a week Admin support person. And then for one of our Regional initiatives which is the Visual Arts Network, I’ve got funding for a 4 day a week coordinator as well so she works here Tuesday to Friday and her name’s Melita and she works specifically on Visual Arts initiatives, and we’ve got a whole visual arts initiative.

E: Is what you are focused on always Community Cultural Development?

L: Yes, arts development and community cultural development.

E: Would you say that your focus is on funding initiatives assessed in the particular areas of need within the locality of the 7 local councils?

L: Yes, trying to get funding is a big part of it because we don’t have the capacity to run big projects ourselves. So basically, without additional funding all we can really do is
respond to, and help enquiries that bubble up from the community. And the other thing that we do from our core program is we organise a whole range of what I call Regional Sector meetings. For instance we convene a meeting of all the people who work with Youth, youth arts and youth workers across a whole range of different portfolios including health and crime prevention and all that sort of stuff. So once or twice a year we convene a big Regional Forum. We do the same for festivals and events – we organise twice a year big festivals of all the cultural festival and event organisers, arts education, all the indigenous arts, all the different sectors that we have identified so that’s bringing together the regional network and then from those forums, discussing needs and developing activities. That’s what we do from core. Anything over and above that, we need to get additional funding for. So we’ve got additional funding for our visual arts strategy and we got additional funding for instance last year to run a youth arts project which took 42 different arts workshops to small and isolated communities for young people. We offered a menu of art forms and the most popular ones were Rap and Hip Hop. But there was also traditional ceramics and mosaic and mural work and a whole range of different things. So that’s an example of a regional project that ran over an 8 month period. Over a thousand young people participated in that and really high indigenous activity and involvement, yes really remote communities.

E: Remote communities within your area?

L: Yes, like Tabulam, Wardell; not so remote but small…and we targeted communities that had never had arts programs running before – Koots Crossing was another one.

E: Do you run the workshops, or do you actually work with the youth workers who are already employed?

L: Basically, we organised it and we engaged arts workers to run the workshops and we worked in partnership with that youth arts network which included for instance 2 of the people most involved were the area health youth outreach workers. So yes, it was a partnership with a whole range of other different organisations.

E: Are those outreach workers independent of you?

L: Yes, but all they did really was facilitate, getting the young people to the workshops. So we employed the artists who ran the workshops, We promoted it, we organised the whole thing, but we got additional funding for that from the Department of Education and the Regional Arts Fund.

E: So you have to dip into whatever funding is appropriate?

L: Yes

E: So, that I would imagine is time consuming. Just knowing how submissions go, you would have to planning way ahead in advance?

L: Yes. We’ve got a 3 year strategy and we’re always working. So
E: Is it about developing relationships with those particular workers you are targeting, knowing who is working…?

L: Well that comes out of the regional forums. We had the regional forum of all the youth workers and all the artists who run your workshops and they had a big discussion that we facilitated about what the priorities were. And the big issue that came up was access, particularly for people in the more isolated communities. So out of that regional forum, a working group was established and that working group basically developed the program. So the same thing’s basically happened with our Festival and Events Group and the same thing happened with Aboriginal Artists initiative; that came out of 2 different regional forums of visual artists, where they said ‘this is what we need.’ And then we took that and developed a program out of it and applied for funding, and then a year later… (laughs).

E: It’s a long term vision, that three year planning

L: Yes

E: So do you give the people who actually facilitate the workshops and who are employed, you get the money…

L: …we employ them, yes

E: Do you have guidelines that they have to stick to

L: Yes, for each project we’ll develop…because they’re all different. Yes, we have contracts with guidelines.

E: Who develops the contracts; you and the team here?

L: Yes, and we use like Arts Law Centre of Australia have standard artist contracts. So we use Pro Forma contracts.

E: So how much initiative, apart from the forum and that input there, but once the program is actually running, how much initiative can they put into what they do and how they operate?

L: Who?

E: The outreach workers who you employ

L: Well, it’s a team all the way along.

E: So how does that work? Do you have meetings?

L: Yes
E: And that’s a planned thing?

L: Yes. And then it comes down to as needs be. So there might be 3 weeks out from the workshop, you know they might get together just a couple of the people in the particular part of the region where we’ve got the workshops going to next.

E: Would you say that your role would be to monitor, apart from getting the funding?

L: No, it’s more facilitation, actively facilitating, and that actually takes a heap of work.

E: Yes, like you’re enabling people

L: Yes

E: Who ordinarily wouldn’t be able to get the money?

L: Yes, and then really working side by side with them sort of capacity building to help them… So we divide it up. So we have our Strategic Plan and we divide up who’s going to deal with what. So Cath runs the Youth Arts Workshop. I’m doing the Festival and Events stuff, I’m doing the Visual Arts stuff. So we just… the 3 year plan has decided who’s in charge of what areas and then we take it and run.

E: Because I’m interested in how people who ordinarily do not have a voice, are enabled. So what you are saying sounds as though it is about enabling and facilitating. Do you have a policy guideline that says, this is how we do it?

L: Not really that specific. We do have some Policy guidelines, but they’re sort of more general about what sort of … like when we would auspice a project that would have to have regional benefits and all that sort of stuff. So we’d have more like guidelines for that sort of thing. But really, because each network is so different and the sorts of programs are so diverse, each one needs its own consideration.

E: So how do you develop a framework of enabling people, that facilitation role?

L: Really, it’s coming from those regional groups. So, for instance, with the youth arts forum, there is a higher participation of young people in those forums. And so the youth workers will bring with them young people from their region and the last one we had was specifically on youth events, where the young people were organising their own events, and we had a whole forum on that. They gave presentations and that sort of thing. So, really, to some extent, we have to make up the guidelines as we go, for each project. Some other regional initiatives we have got, we are just starting to develop now is a big forum of indigenous artists. That is a project where there is an advisory group of 6 people that have come from those forums and they are now developing the guidelines and the framework for a new project.
E: But they have had the experience of having been involved, so that is almost like an enabling process and they can get to the next level?

L: Yes. So Cath is working with that group, and also Craig Jenkins, who is the Indigenous Business Development Manager from the Department of State and regional Development. So they are facilitating the meetings of that group, which involves everything or anything from organising the venue, to transport, that sort of side of it, but not taking on the actual direction of, of not steering the project.

E: The steering is coming from the indigenous artists themselves?

L: Yes.

E: And do you find that that actually does happen, that you can walk away and they drive it?

L: Yes

E: So the connection really with an organisation like this one is that it is about how you get the money to actually operate?

L: Yes. Once the framework is developed, then it comes back to us to really do a lot of work on funding, getting the funding. That is such a specialist thing.

E: Is it government strictures, would you say?

L: Yes

E: Do they change? Do you basically know where the goal posts are and you think “Well, we’re targeting this, you never know?

L: And also because what we are doing, getting funding for basically arts and cultural projects, mainly from non-arts funding bodies, we constantly have to think quite laterally about how to give the funding bodies the measurable outcomes that they need.

E: Have you seen any changes in terms of the expectations that they have had from a body like you, over the period of time. Like, who would they be? Government departments?

L: They vary very radically. That is what I gave the presentation on in Sydney was partners for arts programs. We get more money from regional development agencies, both State and Federal, for our programs than we do from Arts, by a long shot. Our core funding comes mainly from local councils, 60% local councils, 40% Arts. For our programs, we’ve got funding from really diverse organisations and quite diverse partnerships.
E: I was interested in the workshop that you presented at Department of State and Regional Development at Sydney. So that was specifically targeting a group that has the ability to fund? Was that the reasoning for that presentation or was it..?

L: It was about that really, but this wasn’t spoken. The official reason was about partnerships for developing creative communities – that was the official title. But I guess it was a case study on the Northern Rivers because we’ve been quite successful in getting money from multiple agencies, to run arts and cultural development programs. So a single project might have 4 or 5 different funding partners, most of whom are non-arts or three, or it just varies enormously.

E: And so DSRD is just one of those. Would you say that you have to put this presentation on for the other bodies?

L: No, what was great about that presentation was that there were a lot of people from a whole range of different agencies there, so DSRD organised it but there were people there from a whole lot of State and Federal funding organisations

E: And the objective being that you would hopefully only have to do this once, with all these bodies?

L: No, no. That forum was actually about how to develop policy, and so they looked at the Northern Rivers just as a case study. It just gave us a great opportunity to do our pitch.

E: So the policy is, the guidelines were?

L: It was about how to develop policy for developing creative regionals, basically creative industry development in regional Australia.

E: Was that a State initiative, or Federal?

L: It was [State] but there were heaps of Federal agencies there as well. Basically, it was how do we work together. There was all this rhetoric about a whole of government approach to developing regional communities. In practical terms how do we do that and how do we develop policy around that? That’s what the forum was about.

E: OK, so I don’t know whether this question is relevant to you or some other government department, but do you see if there are changes afoot, in terms of how they view what is going on in a community?

L: Definitely.

E: So they are trying to tap into the creativity that is happening at grass roots?

L: Yes, yes.
E: Did you find that personally with how they interacted with you?

L: Yes, although it became very clear, and I think this is really important, that creative industries is not going to be relevant to every community and that there are some communities where there is a high level of creativity or already a significant level of, just, creative industry development happening, that for those communities supporting the creative industries can offer economic benefit, but for communities where there is very little professional arts practice happening, there is no point in developing creative industry initiatives. They need to find…that’s if you are coming at it from an economic development point of view.

E: Is that what you felt was the drive?

L: That’s why they need to have policy, because this is where it just becomes a policy minefield. If you are dealing with an arts organisation, then you argue cultural development. If you are dealing with FACS (Family and Community Services) or a community or a social agency, then you have to argue social and community development. If you are dealing with Department of State and Regional Development or the Federal government, you have to argue economic benefits. In our region, we have been able to get a huge amount of regional development money for arts programs, because here we can argue that it is going to have an economic impact by developing creative industries. If you are in some region where there is hardly any arts activity, then if you want to get money for economic development there, you need to look at agriculture or niche food or whatever.

E: Do you think they have an intention to develop an arts industry where they are arts-poor, where the communities are not really...

L: No, I don’t think they would be interested, no.

E: They are only interested in working with people where it is already happening?

L: As far as that economic development aspect of it goes. There are two very different things. The creative industries are about developing an economic base from the arts. There is a need for community cultural development everywhere. But that is a very limited amount of money that is available for that sort of stuff. So, for a lot of communities, it may well be that they will never have access to economic development money to support their arts programs, because that is not what it is about. That is the problem, I think, about all this talk of creative industry development – it’s all very well and good here, where it is working anyway. There are people employing, basically running little factories, you know, to produce creative product. In other parts of the country, where really the only sort of cultural activity that is going on is very much more at the community based hobby or amateur stuff, amateur level. That is really important as well, but it is much harder to get money to support that sort of activity.

E: Who would be the government departments that are geared to economic development?
L: Well there’s the Department of State and Regional Development. Federal Government, the Department of Transport and Regional Services, they’re the biggest funding agency, that’s the regional services side of it

E: Transport. Do you think they are trying to justify development in terms of roads…?

L: No, no, because it’s Transport and Regional Services, so it’s the regional services side of it. So they’ve put 100’s of thousands of dollars into arts infrastructure and that sort of thing in this region. Because in this region we can argue economic benefit from doing that. But in other parts of the country they wouldn’t do that.

E: How do you actually prove that, like looking at your outcomes?

L: Because we’ve got a whole range of academics who have done research and we’ve got data. So that’s why Cathy Henkel’s work is so important. 10-15 year ago, an academic called Peter Winmoylan did the first survey. Then in 2000, Cathy did a survey and now she’s done another one, so we can plot growth and we can plot the economic impact of the arts activity.

E: So you would say that you are in a very healthy situation because of having that data?

L: Yes, the data and the research. That is what is so important.

E: So for some reason I imagined that Cathy Henkel’s involvement with you is because she is completing her PhD and she is going to be producing film, but it really is with that broader picture in mind that she is involved with you, to argue that it is worth injecting...

L: She’s coming up with the evidence.

E: But it is not because she is actually developing a film project. It’s really the bigger...?

L: She’s doing her PhD in creative industries in regional communities, so she is also doing research on other countries; in Scotland, the highlands and lowlands, in US, New Zealand. So creative industry development in regional communities is her...

E: And the economic impact of those creative industries. So that is really her focus, to argue that there is an impact and it is worth injecting funding into...

L: And looking at how different communities have approached that industry development and what works as far as policy, interventions, what doesn’t work.

E: Does that mean travelling to those other countries?

L: No.
E: Sounds like she’s actually working with her department at QUT in creative industries. So this is specifically designed to look into this whole area but it sounds like there is this move to develop this whole idea that it is worth investing in the arts, because the arts do deliver in terms of the economy. Would you say that that is what is going on, in terms of where the people who are making these decisions, at national and state level, are thinking along those lines and you are part of that?

L: Yes

E: But you, correct me if I am wrong about this – I am not sure – but your view is let’s get the funding, because that is what actually makes things happen. Is your objective to see that there is economic development in this region? Is that part of your objective, or is it the total objective?

L: It is one of the objectives of Arts Northern Rivers. It is basically to “support arts activity that will provide both social and economic benefit to the community.”

E: So looking at the social benefit, can you put a figure on it? Is there, like, a 50/50 percentage..?

L: Of what? Of our activity?

E: Yes. What your objective is, is to see economic development or is it to see social impact?

L: Well really it is to see community cultural development, and that ranges across the whole spectrum. But I guess in this region there is a unique opportunity to actually take that a step further and develop arts industry activity as well.

E: Economically viable industry?

L: Yes, which obviously has a huge impact on the continuing cultural development of the region as well. It has a flow-on effect. Basically, in this region, what we are up against at the moment is that we already have got high unemployment and we have got a massive population explosion happening – there’s 4,000 new people moving to this region every year – and so a whole range of government agencies are working together to say “What the hell are we going to do to provide jobs and business opportunities for all these new people that are coming here?” without destroying the environment and the whole reason that they are coming here. We’ve also got a lot of pressure on land use in the region, so the creative industries are one of several industries that all of these agencies are supporting, because it doesn’t have environmental impact. It’s basically largely home-based, small businesses, that can target markets outside the region. I guess there will be similar stories in other more coastal communities

E: Based on how you are going?
L: Yes, they are facing some of the same issues and they also have, you know, some of the other coastal communities, like the South East region, have a lot of arts industry people moving there from the cities and taking their businesses with them. That is kind of an opportunity as well.

E: So these organisations are working really closely with you or are they just interested?

L: No, they are working really closely.

E: So they come to the forums that you organise?

L: Yes

E: They have input?

L: Yes. They come to us and say we want to do a home-based business seminar. We want to make it arts-specific. How do we do that? Let’s do it together. For instance that just happened last week.

E: That’s like with Family and Community Services?

L: Well that one was with Department of Transport and Regional Services and Aus Industry, which is a federal agency.

E: So you would have to have a fairly sympathetic relationship with these organisations? They would have to understand what you were..

L: Yes.

E: It sounds like they are a little bit progressive?

L: We are really lucky. I think we are really lucky that the people we got working in those communities actually really do understand the benefits and the opportunities for this region.

E: So they would have to be thinking creatively to be able to see the importance of what you are doing.

L: Yes.

E: I just know that one of the arguments that David Throsby has put out there with “Does Australia need a cultural policy?” is that artists seem to be under pressure to show that they are producing and that they are economically viable. So what is your experience in this area where artists just need to produce but there is this constant pressure to make a living and make an industry of it?
L: I think there has to be a broad spectrum and it is really healthy to have a broad spectrum. So, firstly I think a lot of people think that to be commercially successful you have to sell your soul and compromise your creative integrity. I don’t think that is true. But I also think that there is always going to be some types of art that are really important that are never going to be commercially successful and it is really important for governments to continue to support those sorts of arts practices and that it would be cultural death for the nation really, to expect that all art would work from a business point of view, a commercial point of view. So, for instance, art that is critical, you know, political, visual, film, any sort of art form that provides some form of social criticism or is really cutting edge or is at the complete opposite spectrum and is about communities coming together and is important for the community and social aspects, rather than for the actual art work that is produced, that sort of arts activity is really important as well. The danger of going, sort of “creative industries, creative industries” is that there may be a perception from the government “OK, all art can be successful from a commercial point of view. Therefore we won’t need to fund it”

E: So do you think we are going that way? Is it a possibility that all artists will have to..?

L: I think if you look at the amount of money that is available for the arts generally, for pure art, for art for art’s sake, is pretty small in this country already, so I think to some extent, we are there already.

E: So what do you see as being, not so much the solution, but how to address this?

L: I just think we have to always advocate for art’s sake and also for art for community sake as well, as well as creative industry side of it. For instance, in the forum on Friday I went to, it was a creative industries discussion, but I also really emphasised that that’s not the whole picture, that’s just one aspect of it.

E: How was that received?

L: I think there was a general understanding.

E: So how do you see those types of arts are to be supported?

L: Basically there are funding programs or some sort of environment that is more enabling from a policy point of view. It’s funny, I get really cross about it, but a lot of artists come up and lobby me and say “the one thing you need to do for us is to find a way for it to be legitimate for us to be on the dole and not hassled to go and get jobs, because the unemployment benefit is actually paying us to be artists”. Do you know what I mean? It’s some sort of, I guess, recognition that that is valid activity.

E: So where is the legitimacy and recognition to come from?

L: I don’t know. I shouldn’t have mentioned that because it is a tremendous can of worms.
E: The crux of this whole research is about the economic impact of the arts and how do you deal with people that don’t fit within that box?

L: The bottom line is that governments have to pay for it, in the same way that they put millions of dollars into supporting sport activity.

E: So an athlete can get to an elite level?

L: And also just through those basic infrastructure at a community level. In one of our council’s recently, someone calculated that the council spends $2M a year cutting the grass in its sports fields, but that same council is reluctant in putting money into supporting arts infrastructure. So it is just getting that sort of recognition that if you want your community to be healthy, then you have to facilitate participation in culture and people’s ability to express their culture through the arts.

E: The other side to what I am doing is working with Indigenous artists. So, do you see that there is maybe like an in-built disadvantage when it comes to Indigenous people having to justify that they are artists and that they are going to have to apply for funding. It’s in my experience that that could be a major, major issue – that Indigenous people actually don’t get ahead, in terms of being enabled and empowered, whatever, having a voice, because they are having to justify what they do?

L: The whole issue of applying for funding is really, really hard. It is certainly the case in this region that there is a lot of artists, Indigenous artists, but there is so much potential, I see, that isn’t getting tapped and isn’t actually being supported and facilitated. The big point, I think, is that there is a lot of discussion at the moment about partnerships, funding partnerships and all that sort of thing, but for there to be partnerships there has to be somebody to actually stitch together those partnerships and that means somebody who is going to apply for funding from four different agencies is going to be the contact point for the project, and that is basically arts workers.

E: That’s what you were doing anyway?

L: Yeah, but we are only a tiny number of people. At the moment, to my knowledge, there are no indigenous arts workers anywhere in regional NSW. Cath was actually the RADO out west when Gail [Naden] was appointed and developed the funding for that position, but at that stage there was also someone working with Mid North Coast and also someone working at the NSW Ministry for the Arts. None of those positions are there anymore. I just think that that is a massive issue.

E: It seems to be squeezed out, that there is some kind of rhetoric going on saying “Well, we’re not getting the people who are applying”. There’s a voice that is not being heard.

L: That’s just one. There needs to be people all over the State working with Indigenous communities to develop …really there is potential for professional arts, arts in business, micro-business development as well as just arts projects, which are about community building and capacity building and those sorts of things.
E: And where does the initiative come for those types of programs?

L: The communities – there are people having ideas all over the place, but there is no one to really help them through the long, hard, torturous paths of developing those projects and getting the funding.

E: But also developing as a business? Is what you are saying a way of going forward?

L: Potentially, yes, but there is a lot of groundwork that needs to be done.

E: Is it like developing a business? It’s not a community cultural development?

L: It’s both. I think there needs to be both. But what’s happening, I imagine all over the country, but in this region, is that one of the ways that Indigenous communities are doing arts practices is through CDEP programs, or through TAFE or through adult community education. The people who go through those programs come out the other end, but there is no support. So then they just stop, and don’t continue, or most don’t. Some of them keep practising but most of them just stop.

E: So it’s having some idea of how to develop a business idea, so that they are actually independent in how they run their enterprises?

L: Yes. So that is something that we are trying to do now with this group of visual artists, indigenous visual artists. But we have been working nearly a year now with that group and we have got funding applications in that, hopefully, we might get some support, but we don’t know yet.

E: But it is justifying this group as a potential creative industry, in so far as it will be a business?

L: Yes, or both. We have applied to the Department of Communications, IT and the Arts (Federal) and they are actually interested in supporting it for the cultural benefits as well, plus the economic.

E: Do you find that working with these government departments, not so much that the bucket of money is there and they will probably support you, but that it is about having a contact who is a person you work with. I mean you can apply and have a very good submission but not know the key people?

L: Absolutely. You have to talk to everybody and then work together with them to develop it. One of the underwriters, Jack Ritchie, who is in the North West area, said to me when I started the job that the secret to his success (and he has been phenomenally successful in getting funding from a whole range of different agencies and also the corporate sector), his trick is “make friends first with all of the regional representatives of all of these agencies, and then work together with them to develop proposals.” He’s absolutely spot on.
E: It is about the relationships that you develop?

L: Absolutely. So I have followed that advice and I’m really glad that he gave it to me. I realise that that is everything. I mean, it doesn’t guarantee success but it certainly improves the odds.

E: Or you can be told, “Well, don’t even try”

L: Yeah. If you have got a good relationship, they can be candid with you and actually say that “I really don’t think that’s got legs, but let’s have a look at another approach.”

E: So, as an arts organisation, what you do in the Northern River Arts, and there are thirteen other localities in RADO, do you see a future? Is it going to continue progressing and based on what you are saying that the RADOs are successful, to degrees and comparatively in their regions, so do you see that it is something that will develop and grow from where it’s come from?

L: I think so. I think that what is really interesting that’s happening now is, because all of the regional arts boards are autonomous now, they are all developing programs which are specifically relevant to their communities, so there is a huge diversity of programs and activities across the network, and I think that is the key to success. Not expecting that the same program is going to work across the whole State, because the needs and opportunities in all of those different regions are very different.

E: With your regional arts board, they are nominated people or volunteers?

L: They are all actually local government; 7 people on our Board and they all represent a local government area, and each local government area decided on their method of appointing someone to that position. So, for instance, some of the Council’s have nominated a member of staff, some of them it’s a councillor, one of them put out a call to the community for expressions of interest and we have someone who is a community rep, so it varies. As it has turned out, there is only one community rep, from Byron Shire, and all the others are either local government staff or councillors.

E: How often do you meet?

L: Every two months.

E: That sounds like its a successful formula?

L: Yep

E: But that’s not something that is compulsory, across the Board. It just happened how it worked for you here. Who decided that you were going to…?
L: Basically, Regional Arts NSW and the Local Government and Shires Association came in here and worked with all the Councils and got them together as a steering committee. We are a very new regional arts board – we have only been going for two and a half years. They got all of the Councils to come on board and sign a MOU [Memorandum of Understanding] and they appointed a steering committee – each Council basically appointed someone to be on the steering committee – and that steering committee decided what the actual corporate structure would be.

E: Is that how your position was advertised – you would go through the regional arts board or the steering committee?

L: When I was appointed, they were a steering committee and I was initially employed, both Cathy and I were originally employed by Regional Arts NSW and then, once the Board was incorporated and Arts Northern Rivers became incorporated, then we changed over and are employed directly by Arts Northern Rivers.

E: So, as an agency, you have only been here for two and half years?

L: Yes.

E: So prior to that there was nothing really happening here. So its amazing...

L: Oh, there was heaps already happening at a community level but not regional coordination.

E: Coordination of the groups, that’s what your role has done, pull people in? That seems to be a really successful thing.

L: We are lucky that this is a community where already there was this huge amount of arts activity.

E: And they are happy to work with you? You are not getting any people who are dissenting?

L: No.

E: The festivals that you are specifically responsible for, what festivals are they?

L: No, we don’t organise any festivals at all. What I am doing is facilitating a regional festivals and events network. In our region there are hundreds of festivals and events, so just in Tweed Shire alone there are over 100 festivals each year. What I do is bring together all the people who are out there organising festivals and events in their communities and go “OK, what are the common issues that you face and how can we support you and help you in what you are doing?”. So out of the last forum that we organised, the issue came up about audience research and marketing as a focus, so out of that we have now produced, working with Regional Arts NSW, a report where we’ve got 18 different festivals throughout the region who have done market research and put
all of their audience research together and done new interviews with those. They have produced a report, which is fascinating really. It provides a snapshot of who is coming to 18 of the key cultural festivals in the region and what marketing strategies they used to reach those...For instance, the East Coast Blues and Roots Festival in Byron Bay each year is huge. It has like 70,000 people come to that. So that is 1 of 18 case studies and shows that 47% of their people come from SE Qld, which is fascinating, and shows that this is a key market for other festivals and events. That is really interesting where you can do more marketing – we hadn’t done that before, and only an incredibly small amount comes from Victoria or even south of Sydney.

E: What’s the report called? Is it available?

L: It’s still in draft form.

E: It would be really good to see that at some stage?

L: I sent it out to all the festivals to get their feedback. At the moment its got the ridiculous title which is “Arts Northern Rivers Cultural Festivals and Events Network – An Overview of Audience and Marketing”

E: Will it be available on the web?

L: It will be available on our website.

E: Do you know about when I should start looking for it?

L: It will probably be a couple of months, because what we are going to do is have another festival, bring them all together and brainstorm the strategies. The Northern Regional Development Board has done quite a bit of work on developing the creative industries and we have worked together with them.

E: Is that because they are local government people?

L: No, because we have been working with them. We have a music development strategy as well.

E: So it sounds like these meetings would be really fairly intensive. Talking a lot about all these issues and having direction? They sound very productive as well?

L: Yeah, its great actually. Somewhere I have a copy – I thought I had a copy. The Northern Rivers Regional Development Board have developed this massive document called the Regional Industry and Economic Plan and, in that, they have picked out 6 different industry sectors that they think should be supported, and one of them is a creative industries strategy. They have worked quite closely with us and a whole range of other arts organisations to develop the creative industry strategy, so you should have a look at those as well.
E: And they are on the web?

L: They are the Northern Rivers Regional Development Board. Their website is actually – if you do a Google search for “invest Northern Rivers”, I think it is something like investnorthernrivers.org.au or something like that.

E: So it would be on that website?

L: Yes, you can download it. It’s called the Regional Industry and Economic Plan.

E: And that kind of marries in with these. So they are all related, because it is the same group of people?

L: Yes.

E: It’s really an amazing thing that people are working so productively together.

L: Yes. It’s good.

E: Probably it’s the area that does encourage creativity, I suppose. How people work?

L: Yes. I think that’s been one of the things, probably one of the most important things that we have done in the last two and a half years, has been that bringing people together. Someone described it the other day as “joining the dots” and so, for instance, the first time that I brought together this Festivals and Events network, there was the organiser of the Byron Bay Writers Festival, the organiser of the Splendour in the Grass, which is a big youth music festival in Byron Bay. Both massive events happen one month apart and their organisers had never met before. They are in the same town, you know, and that goes across the whole region. The same goes for the professional arts organisations – they had never come together before.

E: They must have known, but didn’t take that initiative?

L: Yeah. It’s quite a simple thing, but its actually enabled us all to really work together as a region.

E: So it really is a case of just ringing up and saying “Why don't we have this meeting?” I think we have covered everything except maybe, “If you had a personal vision, as in your personal vision statement, would you have an idea where you would like to go or like to see happen?

L: For this region?

E: Yes

L: I would like to see this region continue to flourish as a leading creative region and a region that is recognised nationally as a creative region, and a region that can actually
give something back and enrich the culture of the whole country. I get frustrated when I think that a lot of people in the capital cities see that cultural development in the regions means sending the art from the city out to the regions, like it’s a blank slate. That is what Regional Arts NSW has really been trying to counter by setting up these autonomous regional arts boards. I’d really like to think that this area provides a great place where artists can actually work and still be connected to the cities and really be…. 

E: They are recognised in their own right; that they are just as valid and you don’t have to be constantly referencing back to the metropolitan and city areas?

L: Basically seeing the Northern Rivers as a nationally recognised centre for the arts.

E: That city/bush divide is very pronounced wherever you go, I think. For some reason, there is resentment, I think, with people who do operate in these regional areas and there doesn’t seem to be an understanding or recognition of what they do. It mightn’t be world-shattering, but it still is a valid and viable thing. I think that is a concern that would be...

L: And cultural enrichment needs to be a two-way exchange, between the cities and non-metropolitan areas.

E: Is there anything that you are going to produce that is going to go to the city?

L: That is what is kind of ironic about it. A lot of the artists in the region already are selling their work nationally and internationally. A lot of the filmmakers who live here, sell their work internationally. That’s the other point I should make that has been recognised by Cathy’s research – there are more artists per capita than anywhere else in Australia and that there are more filmmakers in this region anywhere outside of Sydney and Melbourne. So there are more filmmakers in the Northern Rivers than there are in Brisbane, for instance, and some of those are really successful people who make things like Sea Change, or they make films that already are..

E: Recognised?

L: Recognized nationally, but there is just not that understanding that it is possible to live in a regional community and produce quality...

E: It is not substandard, its not second rate, it is just as important?

L: Yes

E: And that should be at a government level or across the board?

L: Across the board. Particularly I think at a government level.

E: I suppose its getting the voice that actually says that that is what’s going on. I suppose we are talking about the media too. If it purports a certain image, then that’s what…?
L: Yes

E: It is about media too?

L: Yes. The other thing - I just think its not so much a vision statement, its just something that I would really like to see – since I started in this job I guess I’ve accessed some of the Indigenous communities in the region. I grew up here, and I’ve never been to Box Ridge or Tabulum or some of those indigenous communities before, I’ve just been really shocked at the lack of opportunities for people, and lack of support for people in those communities. So I would love to see some sort of thriving Indigenous arts co-op or enterprise in this region, as well.

E: Coming from here, this agency?

L: Or us supporting. If we could facilitate that, the development of that, as an independent organisation, I think we would have really achieved something.

E: So what are the obstacles in doing that, do you think?

L: Just time, really. Just that it takes so long to get every single grant and to build the capacity of the artists and the communities.

E: It’s almost like you need another worker here, that’s specifically...?

L: That’s what we’ve got a funding application in, to try to get funding to pay basically an outreach worker to work with those artists and help them develop some sort of artist-run organisation.

E: Is that going to be a recognised, identified position?

L: Yes.

E: Well good luck.

_Tape ends_
II. Hannah Raw Transcript

Hannah Semler, Regional Arts Development Officer Arts OutWest
Interview recorded at Bathurst Arts OutWest Office CSU
16 December 2005

E: What is the title of your position?

H: I’m the Executive Officer of Arts OutWest in colloquial terms or in terms of the NSW Ministry for the Arts who fund my position, call my position it’s a Regional Arts Development Officer. However, we do more than that. We are the governance, I’m also the public officer of the organization so I have responsibility for managing the organization as an organization which is a not-for-profit incorporated association and has a Board of Management – we just call it the Board and 11 Directors on that Board representing all kinds of backgrounds and parts of the region that we represent which is broadly the Central West for NSW

E: you were saying that you are juggling 3 positions at the moment. Is that part of what you were just describing?

H: Oh well, if you really want to be truthful it’s more than that, but identified as of the 9th of January we will be a slightly new structure from a staffing point of view. We will have 2 full time positions, myself and new full time communications Officer which that position in fact, incorporates 2 positions that were there until now. So the Media Promotions and the Information and Publications website and all the rest of it. So the new person will be doing everything from looking after and managing the website, keeping it updated other than our database on the website which is updated by our web provider and right through to the weekly compilation of all of ‘what’s on’ in the Central West and promoting that on radio. Entering the database you know, managing all of the information that comes in and also the dissemination. So the input and output of that information and as well is effectively my 2 IC, assists me administratively to some extent as well. And then we have a casual Finance Officer who will be looking after all of the memberships and all of the Financial Management of the organization and she’s now trained, as a Registered Accountant and has worked for the organization before and has been away for a year. We’ve had someone in the interim who, in fact, we’ve mutually decided she just doesn’t have quite enough knowledge or skill and that was causing me a lot of stress, and the organization some stress so unfortunately we have to let her go, ’cause she’s a lovely person, very interested in the Arts and there are aspects of the work that she’s been delivering in some of the administrative; she’s perfectly capable but only have so many resources. For the moment…but we’re very excited about the future

E: Australia Council has gone through major restructure, has that impacted on your position?
H: Not directly because the Australia Council in fact provides absolutely no core funding to us. In fact the Community Cultural Development which is now under a new structure called Community Partnerships still administering the CCD grants program and in fact the policies for that haven’t changed as yet. As yet, but in this last year not one single regional arts program within the whole state of NSW received a grant from the CCD. In spite of applications including ours and very disappointing.

E: Do you have any idea why that’s happened?

H: Not entirely, other than there’s always more applications. But I think that they really didn’t check back – that the assessment panel who we had complained about over many years now – it will be a new assessment panel, I’m pretty sure it is. We were briefed on the other day. And there’s a new reference group on which we will have to, very key very important, representatives from the sector. One is one of my colleagues another Regional Arts Development Officer Jack Ritchie is now on that panel. And on that Committee he was specially asked, which is fantastic and Frank Panucci is taking up the position of Executive CEO of Community Partnerships, and there’s another person who’s on there and I’ve just forgotten who it is. So I think that we will see some changes as a result, just having better quality, skilled representation within that new structure.

E: Now with your position you do have a region that you minister to...?

H: It’s the central west of NSW and broadly speaking it’s from Lithgow, so as soon as you come over the mountains, through to Wellington and across down to Lake Cargellicco. It’s currently, the membership of Local Governments fund virtually half of the core program comprises of 10 out of the 13 local governments that make up the Central West. And we’re just hoping to win back the other 3. That’s been a bit of a sore point for us, should be embarrassing for them, but that differs. And one of them is now the amalgamated mid-Western. It was Mudgee and Rylestone, Weddin also fell out of the program; that’s a very small Council. I mean they were prepared to stay but for such a small amount of money that the Board thought that was just too unequal – they’d been paying the same amount for years and just thought that that could continue when we’d been developing a very strong professional program. And the third one fell out this year and that was Forbes.

E: So with the funding of Arts Outwest, it does rely on local government funding?

H: Absolutely

E: Is it 100%

H: The NSW Ministry (for the Arts) last year, well the previous year approved, but last year was the first year of a three year triennial funding period which will end in 2007 and the beauty of the triennial has been that not only is it that it is triennial and we didn’t have to apply each year, just provide a report to the Ministry, but most importantly it provided a base of $85,000 instead of the 50-55,000 which existed for years and years. So while the State Government has had to clamp down, we’ve been very fortunate that
out of the community cultural development sector of the NSW Ministry for the Arts, Grants Program our sector in the Regional areas takes up 60% of that part of the budget. So we’re very fortunate and its based on the fact what are now 13 Regional Arts Programs; so there’s $85,000 times 13 being paid out – is seen as being good value for money in what is delivered out in regional areas and the Ministry wouldn’t have a hope to deliver that if it had offices at that sort of cost – it would cost them a lot more. Effectively the kinds of CCD outcomes can be achieved more by our positions being more one of liaison and developing other sorts of partnerships and attracting other monies, non-arts monies as well makes it possible for arts and cultural outcomes to be regionally relevant, not just as a state wide regional, the idea of regionally rural, but quite specific to each of the program areas. So our program in the Central West is very different from Orana Arts or Outback Arts or North West Arts. We’re responding to the identified needs to the requests, to the way in which in our instance the organization has developed we’re the oldest of the organizations in that sense so we’ve definitely come out of – and there’s a few others that have come out of the old Arts Council model – you may know the story of Regional Arts NSW; it goes back more than 50 years and effectively a woman called Dorothy Helmrich who drove for the passion of establishment of all of these Arts Councils, some of them of which are up to 60 years old, I think Parkes may be one of them. And they looked to bring Performance, even if it was 2 or 3 performances a year into their areas. So the Arts Councils were if you like, presenter groups. There was very little infrastructure at that time; there was very little, there was no professional companies or touring companies as such. So they worked hard at getting that. And they provided the social well being – social cultural well being for their communities. And obviously, just like today, many volunteers in regional areas are members of CWA’s and Probus and other organizations similarly with the Arts Councils. The Arts Councils today have dropped off enormously. Their resources have been used up. There is increasing infrastructure, particularly in our region, it’s not so in the case of Outback Arts area west of Narromine you really, there’s virtually none so in a sense their demographic and physical facilities as well as human skills and resources are probably like this might have looked 30-40 years ago. So the Central west is well endowed, very well endowed compared to many other areas, and has a burgeoning brilliantly active set of communities – some are more active than others and some...there are holes. For instance Parkes used to be like a show case community, and now they have fewer clusters. But if you try to have a really good exhibition...there’s few and far between artists identified who could exhibit professionally which makes it more difficult interestingly. So there’s been changes but whilst that’s happened the Music and Dramatic societies are still very strong; they’ve got a good Theatre, they’re trying to maintain that for younger people and develop the skills. They’ve got a couple of exceptional teachers out there, or practitioners who also teach and need to make a living, including an Indonesian born and Indonesian Classic dancer who then came as a Refugee to West Australia and then from there, got into the Australian Centre for Performing Arts in West Australia, got to do contemporary dance ended up in Melbourne, falling in love with a bloke who’s got a stainless steel tank making business, ended up in Ballarat or Geelong, had a dance group, he’s featured, he contributed to fringe and to other festivals. Well they re-located to Parkes – Parkes has got Nixon Edward who is this fantastic dance teacher and enthuses so many young people and finally, it’s taken a little bit of time, I told them almost I knew when they arrived there, I
said ‘you’ve got a fantastic dancer, you’ve got to use him!’ and then they’ve got a recently arrived singing teacher, who is also a voice teacher, so – I had a call this morning from a member of …who was also a founding member of the Arts Council old time family Warwick Tom, about wanting to get some money to get intensive program for their young people, employing these two professionals. So that’s wonderful you know. I mean he’s just done every production too – he actually was the Director - first time in his life – a musical production so you could see the strengths, the strengths were in the choreography, and not so much in the singing (laughs) and I am one of his supporters. He did choose the lead role fellow because he could dance, but not because he could sing – room to improve. Thankfully the young fellow did actually recognize that, so you know, if this is an instance of scholarship around community arts practice, I mean I see that these sorts of groups, and it is these music and dramatic societies in particular that hold a lot of these communities, and deliver the health, the artistic and performing health back into the community – they’ve got their audiences because people are loyal to their locals, and within this region we actually we have some bloody good small performing groups. They put on 2 or 3 productions in Parkes a year; in Cowra they’re in a little bit in a malaise at the moment, but they used to put on a almost a subscription series, 2 or 3 a year. Here in Bathurst, you’ve got the Carillon, you’ve got the Bathurst Theatre Company, Bathurst Theatre Company does more series theatre, but Carillon does musical, well it does 1 or 2 a year. And then in Oberon you’ve got the Wild Oats which is actually the arm of the Arts Council, and it just so happens they’ve got a person who actually came out of the media but she has an incredible skill for directing, Di Manson and they put on really insightful plays, they’ve got their audience there, they don’t have to get more, because they’re all volunteers not relying on an income. In Lithgow…they do 2 or 3 shows a year, the musical society there and always have their audiences, and the Artistic Director and lead for it Ray Burton, she’s the main music or singing teacher at the High School and has been there for ever, but very active; rehearse every single Thursday. They’re extremely, very committed and the sense of belonging, and I think that sense of belonging characterizes these sorts of groups in regional areas that provides an avenue to, partly to socialize, but to have other meaning outside of other things in their lives.

E: With the Arts Councils, what exactly is your relationship with the different Arts Councils in the different localities?

H: Most of them are members, some of them are slight lapsed members, but…

E: So they do form their organizations and if they don’t pay membership, they still continue doing what they do within their own…

H: As long as they’ve got their own, yeah…their activity isn’t dependent on their membership with us, but you know they should be members of us, partly because of their history but partly because we can tap into all this stuff, and they use us as advisory bodies

E: But do you find that they generally pay membership and they do access the resources available?
H: Some do and some don’t and it goes through waves, it depends who’s there and who’s leading. Parkes was one of our strongest and unfortunately they basically ran themselves down financially as well and the people just on the committee ran themselves down – they’d been there for 12 years.

E: And if you see that happening, it’s almost like you can’t save a situation, you can only…

H: Oh well, I was encouraging…I mean I came in, I’ve only been here a short time, these people are part and parcel of their communities for ever. The only thing you can do is advise and encourage others to join if they would like to use a vehicle, and you know I say, because people ring us and ask for advice and how to get something up and running. Funding is not there for individuals really, unless you’re a practicing professional artist, you really won’t get the money, you need to be auspiced somehow or other. So I’ve often said ‘look use your local Arts Council’ whoever and why don’t you join, ‘Oh, yeah well they kind of ah.’ There sometimes are barriers there and it’s usually based on the personalities as is the situation in many volunteer organizations. So yeah, one just has to overcome this. I just found out the Lachlan Arts Council which has also been here a long time, their President is a key member of the Arts Outwest Board and has also been 15, 16 plus years, um I just found out that they’re right down to 7 financial members and you know, money is pretty, they’ve got to be pretty careful. And they have 1 member who virtually always comes and has turned everybody else off. In this case it isn’t age, but sometimes it is. It’s more just by virtue of the personality – it could be one person that can turn off, and you know, I find other things happening in the community. I say well, but I find out not as I should find out. I find out after the event, and they haven’t told the Arts Council they’re having the activity, or the Arts Council knew in the last minute they’re having the activity and haven’t told us, so they haven’t been promoted. And in a place like Lachlan, Condobolin whilst they did incredibly well. But they’re these 4 artist who have just put on an exhibition just 2 weeks ago and we knew nothing about it, and I said to them ‘please join the Arts Council, they need members and you could do more things and you know, anyway…

E: Did you actually say how long you were in this position?

H: I’ve been just over 4 years. I came in August 2001.

E: Have you described the Policy which funds your position? Do you know what the policy is that drives…

H: Effectively as I said, the funding comes from the Community Cultural Development Unit from the NSW Ministry for the Arts. So delivering community cultural outcomes within the region is effectively the tenure of the job and that’s described by our mission statement, constitution and objectives, and our Strategic Plan. So we submit that when we put in an application, well next time it will be for 3 year funding. I think we have to put it in, I’m not sure if we have to put it in now in 2006…we must have to put it in now for 2007. Yeah, I’m pretty sure ‘cause we’re just putting in a huge, as a state wide
Regional Arts network, with Regional Arts NSW have put in 2 months ago, have put in a major bid for significant increases. Because when we got our 85, we’d actually put in a bid for 120. And if we get the 160 we’re asking for, even the 120 would enable us to put on a Project Manager in this organization for instance. The 85,000 did allow a number of the Programs to put on a second person whilst we already had some of that in place. So Community Cultural Development outcomes that in our instance promote, facilitate, education, assist and advocate for Arts and Cultural development in this region, that’s our Mission Statement. And I can give you a copy of the Strategic Plan, remind me. It’s also on our website.

E: Would you describe your role as hands-on, or more about policy development? I mean is it more practically oriented, or really about policy?

H: We don’t, certainly in my position, I don’t deliver the hands on. I if you like, direct, help to coordinate, sometimes when I Project Manager something, a regional program of some sort. My hands on yes, in the office and delivering out and printing, administrative things and marketing stuff and going out and spruiking and speaking and attending meetings across the regions. And those meetings could include Council base meetings with other service organizations like yesterday in Orange with Community Services Sector to develop Partnerships. So my role is to work effectively with almost every target group service deliverer and to represent the organization in that situation. But also to advocate and also hear what the needs are and bring them back to translate them in to programs which I suggest to the Board, and the Board signs off through the Strategic Plan. So what the Board is actually the policy, strictly speaking the Policy Driver, I would make all the recommendations to the Board to our quarterly meetings. And rarely, but sometimes, the Board comes up with specific directives as well.

E: So it is a very close relationship that you have with the Board?

H: Absolutely, absolutely. And effectively we are one in that respect and I think that this position wouldn’t work and it hasn’t in the past when there’s been friction between the Executive Officer and the Board, the Executive Officer usually resigns. And because it’s such a tough job. You know, you’re managing staff in an organization. You’re managing a huge range of relationships including all those potentially, 13 councils and there’s not one person in any one of those Councils, it’s a whole bunch of different people and you’re always trying to drive certain agenda. So in our strategic plan we have particular directions and from the Strategic Plan which gets reviewed every 2 to 3 years, it gets reviewed annually, but it’s a 3 year program, so we’re in the 2005-07 plan in 2007 we will write the 2008 to 11 or whatever it is, plan. So they kind of overlap. The point is that from that strategic plan come the operational plans and the main priorities for that year. So this year, our priority was youth and a youth arts program because we’re capitalizing on the Biennial funding from TAFE, actually it’s not from TAFE, it’s from the Arts Start program which is administered by TAFE. And that was the opportunity, so obviously we focused on that. We looked for other funding, that was all last year we did that funding. A whole lot of funding applications got made thankfully, and we could build a slightly larger program than previously and helped to develop Catapult Youth Arts festival. And next year we’ve said, well I’ve been saying for the last 2 years, that
we’re going to drive a Creative Industries program which I outlined a bit last night which has several arms to it. It yet has to be articulated on paper. And yet has to get the funding, which I’m literally 12 months behind on because of many other things. And that’s part of the problem, is that when you’re actually in the middle of a year of delivering a program, even if you’re not the main hands-on driver, there are so many little ends and loose ends and aspects to it. We had a major factor in the first half of the year and that was we were renewing our Memoranda of Understanding with Local Government which we tried to do in fact after the Local Government elections, but we missed it last year because of the…so whilst the local government elections were in March, the amalgamations happened in May. So we held off, and we didn’t get to anything in September when we should have. So it took us all the first part of the year and we paid dearly for that by energy and time and so on. These things can just take over. So for 5 months, I hardly did any CCD delivery. I was running around juggling balls, literally. And having sleepless nights. So, the coming year we will probably have to do the grant applications even though we’re trying to get it for that year.

E: So the grant applications will relate to the priority which is creative industries?

H: Creative Industries. But we will still have…because ArtStart is going to be changed, we’ve also got the opportunity not to leave the Youth Arts Program in abeyance. We’re actually got the opportunity to pick it up in July next year, or from July next year if we get the money. And stagger that over a 2 year period. It’s not more money. But what we can do, knowing that, is we could apply to other areas like I did for this year, to add value to it. And that means we start to see something. And if we could get the Councils to say alright, this is what we want to do and their staff…We start to augment each others programs. With Councils. With the program that we have the administrative role for, but the effective delivery happens within communities. We aren’t the one’s, Arts Outwest aren’t the ones delivering. We pay people to deliver, whether we pay through a small arts program to a community group, or a council so we provide them with the money. Or we provide them with artistic resource.

E: So when you get the money, do you actually employ the people within the community groups that will be delivering that particular program? Are you directly involved in that?

H: We employ or we recommend the artists. It’s the artistic component of all of this that we take some responsibility in making possible out there. So if you Liz Slottje could be utilized with your skills in XYZ communities within this program, it’s the money that Arts OutWest has raised to pay you, and we ask that the communities either through Local Government or whether they’re existing groups pay for venues, refreshments and transport and local coordination and all that. Finding materials. Sometimes the artist comes with the materials, so that’s part of the cost and that’s great, and that’s a way of doing it.

E: So you really have to work very, very closely with the community organizations that you’re funding in effect, because you’ve raised the grants and then you’re working with the communities. You recommend whether they accept it or not, you recommend the
people or the person who will be delivering the service. So it is really a close relationship that you need to develop with the community organization.

H: Or Council, with Council staff. Like in the youth situation we’re talking about trying to get the community development managers or the youth officers if they’re there. Or if they’re not directly associated with Council they might be with an organization that’s in the community.

E: But do you get funding that would supplement what council actually does do

H: No. Well, generally Council’s not doing that same thing. Or they’re not able to undertake it. Good example with some of the activities that we either make recommendations on the funding for, or the, and when I say we…I put together an assessment panel for a grants recommendation program such as the Country Arts Support program. That’s something that everyone of us do. The Ministry provides the money; It’s administered through Regional Arts NSW but we make the recommendations, and in that instance, Councils, community groups, the local art gallery they’ll apply for funding to run a workshop. Let’s say Emma does that for NAIDOC week and they provide a small grants application, and we make the recommendation whether it gets funded or not.

E: To the Board?

H: We actually make that recommendation – ‘we’ is an assessment panel which I organize, but I’m not one of the assessors. There are 2 board members, and preferably one of them is within the Executive, and an outsider who I get on board dependent upon all sorts of things, whether it’s for a youth base then I’ll try to find somebody relevant. When it’s more performance base when I see the applications. However, mostly I don’t see applications. I just have to try and find somebody and Roxanne Smith from State and Regional Development agreed to be on the last…we had asked Alvaro Marquez because he’s been a practitioner himself and also because he has a broader community economic perspective, so we thought that was appropriate. That was for that particular assessment panel. And that assessment panel only makes recommendations. We are not finally responsible for the recommendation, they go to Sydney and are usually signed off as a matter of formality.

E: Ministry of Arts?

H: By a panel which under Regional Arts NSW. Way too bloody over complicated. I wish the money would come straight to us, but then there are some Regional Arts Programs that don’t have people, well they just don’t have people. This takes work and if you were on your own running a program and you had to not only put together an assessment panel, then you have to write all the letters, you have to administer all of that it can be onerous. We could do it. We’ve done it before for Art Start and we could do it. And if we had it regularly we would write it into our administration cost and we would take some money out of that block of money, but it’s probably at the moment still, even though I don’t agree with it, it’s probably still more efficient for one state wide servicer
of that Regional Arts NSW grants and funding Officer there, which she administers CASP, the Regional Arts fund for NSW, and get a quick response back.

E: And she’s based in Sydney and it all goes virtually to that one person?

H: It goes back to her, all the applications with the recommendations and the pro forma sheet all completed

E: So really she has the ultimate say

H: No, no the recommendations go to a State Panel. She administers it.

E: But does she get all the applications and makes recommendations based on the applications that come in and then it goes go the State...?

H: No, we make the recommendations; our assessment panel makes the recommendations. I put all of that together. This is the busiest time in March, when all that has to be done. It’s quite a lot of work. It’s at least a full 5 days of work, at least. Let alone all the lead up to it, when you’re convening with people who have got this idea and you’ve got to go through...I invite people to put in a draft and I’ll check it, whether the budget’s right before...Giving them all the best chances in the world – that’s our role, the development role, our advisory role. It’s no good for just saying ‘oh put in a grant application, it’s lousy and the budget’s crap.’ So our role is to help people build capacity, skills and all the rest of it in that. And that’s also why I go out and run grant writing workshops and that’s why I suggested it. Last night and the people who know how to write grants thought ‘no, no, no’ but they know how to write a grant. The reason is that they’re talking about, it all comes back to the same people. Because there isn’t a broad enough people who know how to do it. So I’m trying to say...

E: Go to the workshops. My question actually was which you’ve answered before I’ve asked you is “Are you responsible for making decisions for funding or making recommendations regarding funding applications?” So really you’re the first port of call when the groups apply for funding...

H: Or are interested in looking for funding. They come to us and we make recommendations whether there could be potentially for the sort of thing that they tell us. And then I invite them to put forward their draft and I might make some comments, I might check their budgets, I might say ‘I don’t think that fund will fund that aspect, but will fund this. Why don’t you increase such and such’ that’s just based on experience

E: That goes back to them?

H: It goes back to them. They’re still responsible finally

E: It goes back to you?

H: No, well the CASP one yes, the CASP one has to come back here. But all the others
E: Once it goes back your recommendation…

H: It depends what it is. It goes back to the State. That’s for CASP, only for CASP. We don’t have at this stage a grants program. We’re trying to establish a deductible gift recipient status and so that people can give us donations which we want to set up in a public fund which would be to augment CASP, so that in fact when these applications come in we can actually either add value, or say ‘alright well this half CASP will fund and this half we’ll fund.’ Or out of time applications for something that really is worthwhile that we feel needs to be supported. But that’s down track

E: What are the significant factors you are looking for when assessing applications for funding. So there must be certain…

H: First of all we advise people based around the criteria that any of the grants and demonstrate in their guidelines within the policy directive. So whether it’s for the Ministry or from the Australia Council, or whether from the Foundation for Rural and Regional renewal, or from DOTARS, or from partnerships, or from any other source, we try to and I’m sometimes not entirely on top of it, but that’s my role is to get on top of it, and if I’m not, irrespective of whether I am or not, I always tell people to go back to the original funding body and speak to the Officer. So, I’m the first port of call for ‘this is what we’d like to do, do you have any suggestions for funding’ and we’ll go through these are the suggestions and I say ‘read the guidelines carefully, have a look at the application form. Make a decision whether it’s worthwhile.’ Sometimes they’re…be warned they’re very competitive. Come back to me’ Sometimes I ask a few more questions and I’ll just say, ‘look, unfortunately this is not where you’ll get money, even though the guidelines would seem to attract your type of applications, but I doubt very much that you’ll be successful.’ And unfortunately the whole policy directive for most grants has become so politically correct, which means that if you’ve got Aboriginal content and can demonstrate that, and get the letters of support and so on, or people in regional areas in remote or disadvantaged situation – you’ve got a bloody good chance of getting money…

E: Better chance than others who may not be in that…And that does actually engender resentment…

H: That’s right. Absolutely, huge resentment. And for good reason. Look I was in the Northern Beaches of Sydney. We could not get money. For love or money, we could not get it because we were seen to be in a well heeled part, elite area. And we weren’t working with elite, we were working with all kinds of far from elite members of the community, in community arts practice directly – very hard.

E: State and Federal Government have that bias as well do you think? I would have imagined that they were trying to be a little more even handed

H: It depends on what it is. In the Arts Sector I find, there are certain directives that are in the more elite arts area; it’s driven by named, known artists. If you have a project that
has got sex appeal ‘cause it’s got somebody who’s know, who has got a bit of a history, and has got not just a long CV but recognized in major institutions, whether it’s in performing arts or the other or in literature, you’re more likely to get some money.

E: And that’s regardless of the Aboriginal or regional remote…

H: That’s a different sort of thing. In the Community Cultural Development sector I suggest those young people, regionally disadvantaged remote, lack of access, opportunity, blah blah blah, if you can demonstrate all of that and can get the letters of support that demonstrate it as well. We write letters of support, I do one or two a week, of all kinds.

E: You don’t actually have a list of preferences of who you would support over another type of group, because they’re all equally valid to you? For instance this is sport, and that’s not as important as...

H: I’d love an application for something that’s creative from a sports organization. No, absolutely not at all. And equally in our promotions we support…no we don’t bias, but we see that the people we can help most are those that have got the least ability to project a voice for themselves. So those small community groups, the little craft centres that often run, like Parkes Craft Corner is the only regular open space where there’s local arts and crafts. It’s not the kind of arts and crafts that you would put in the regional gallery, but what it is, is the…it’s the place that everybody knows, it’s always open, there’s always someone friendly there. There’s some quality work in terms of the craftsmanship. It’s accessible, people buy it, you know they know that there’s a supply, and they send us and do a new feature artist every single month. They send us the information right on time. But they would send this typed – we’re going to make a book of Kath McGuire’s little once a month notices. Kath McGuire is an 80 plus year old woman who’s the publicity officer for them, and on a mechanical old typewriter, you can see it, you can feel it, it has character. And it’s authentic, it’s absolutely genuine, the basic information that we need. She came to a funding grant writing workshop in Parkes with one of the other members, can’t remember the Secretary whoever it was, and Tracey Sorensen our outgoing Media Officer did to our segment on writing for media, tips for media, and found out that Kath was there. And she actually had a sample of Kath’s thing, not knowing that she was coming in advance. And she said ‘this is an example. This comes regularly when it’s due, with the absolutely basic information of what we need, not too much, not too little. Just exactly what we need. We can still ask more questions if we want to.’ Training the community to get that kind of outcome is fantastic, and it’s easy to support that. It’s not because the best art or the best craft, but it’s about providing a voice for them that wouldn’t otherwise happen. So go to Parkes Craft Corner, you’ll hear us regularly on the radio promoting Parkes Craft Corner the latest exhibition running through until blah. And or youth group, or there’s a meeting of an Arts Council cultural group or whatever, so we don’t discriminate, we just do try to provide a voice for the small people.

E: Do you actually see that part of your role is training the community
H: Absolutely, Capacity building

E: Capacity building in grants writing? That’s one aspect

H: That project development and planning, infrastructure development and planning

E: This is with the little…not the Executive Directors of organizations, community? Anybody who may have the skills who are interested, who have the rapport

H: We find Council Officers that need this training. I’m not kidding you. Our last…and youth officers, and community development officers, they haven’t had project management experience. They come out of training either at TAFE or university and they know the subject matter, but actually delivering events and how to organize and do their own publicity, and what’s good publicity

E: So how do you actually train these people doing that?

H: Well partly it’s a hit and miss and partly we need, and that’s one of the reasons for the Creative Industries development program, is that there will be a strong training component.

E: But are they aware of this service that you’re providing them, or is it really that you assess that there’s a need there, so you go in and you think ‘I can actually do the capacity building because I can see there’s a need and they do actually need to develop these skills.’ So is it like, do you go in and say I’m going to assist you because there’s a bit of a problem here and I can actually help you…

H: Well, in the first instance we offer our services, not because we say ‘you’ve got a problem’ but…recently I had to go back to a community, Wellington in fact. I called a meeting of the Youth Officers and all but one came. Specifically because one part of our Youth Arts program was very badly delivered there, and most unsatisfactory. And in terms of its desired outcomes and sustainability and communication, all sorts of things. So in this instance I actually went there and demonstrated to them where the problems lay, and let them actually see the facilitators report which was pretty damning, and would have really upset the main person, she hasn’t spoken to me directly since. She was on leave, but you know, made it clear. And others, some people took direct responsibility for it but effectively it was dysfunctional. And offered to help, but didn’t lay down ‘look you’ve got to do this next time, just that we need to work more and that I’ve got money for you, but you need to get yourselves organized.’ So in a way I’ve got a bit of a carrot ‘I said we’ve got money left over because you didn’t come to Catapult. I’ve go a little bit of money left over, there’s other things. You’ve got money that was allocated to you in CASP you did nothing about it, and you were supposed to, you didn’t organize any extra time with the facilitators when we specifically gave you that opportunity, you didn’t come back, you didn’t communicate with us, blah blah blah. Yeah, so we’re not pulling the plug

E: did you get any outcomes?
H: Well not yet

E: Oh you’re waiting, so the seed has been planted…

H: I have alerted them to the problem and I did it not picking on a person, but picking on the community, the whole lot of them. And some of them weren’t fully aware…they knew they were aware this project was happening, but then they weren’t communicated to properly by the coordinator. They were in fact given the impression there was no room for participants that they had their quota. Then what ended up happening, there that it was one school class or a group of kids who didn’t want to go to school, who then turned up at this workshop as an alternative, like they’d been given this choice, and there were some really difficult kids amongst them and whilst the school supposedly sent their, the person who works with these difficult kids, facilitators said there wasn’t anybody there, from the PCYC who was supposed to be the auspicer and manager of this project, they did nothing and Narelle had a death in the family and was not there and anyway, it was just poorly managed. And there are discrepancies between the facilitators report and the other, what I heard there and the person who was from the school, no-one from the school. So there were still a number of discrepancies. Anyway that’s getting a little bit into detail…

E: So you’ll go back to fix…

H: We’ll follow up, and say ‘well how did you go, what have you decided to do? When would you like to do it now?’ ‘Cause we did a lot of discussion in the school holidays and ‘no and too short time’ and obviously we didn’t organize it well, and ‘we don’t want to rush it this time dah dah.’ But there are more youth officers in Wellington than anywhere else in the whole bloody Central West and they couldn’t get it together, that was the worst one. And that’s what I also, I said ‘there are some communities that just pulled out and volunteers put in money and time and effort and here, this community has got more youth officers than anywhere else, and couldn’t deliver a good program you know. It seemed such a shame.

E: So the worst case scenario is that come funding time and they do run out

H: My ringing back ‘have you got yourselves organised?’ ‘look sorry no’ I have to say ‘look I have to give it to another community’

E: So really there is going to be...

H: There are repercussions of that though. Because then we’ll be the baddies that we’ve pulled the plug, and Wellington is a fragile relationship for us at Arts Outwest so politically we actually do need to, and we had told them that we had put in $20,000 worth of programming there, but they themselves aren’t delivering, and it’s because Council is disassociated from those…When we talked about the Council, when I brought up Council in that meeting, ‘Council you’ve got to be kidding, they don’t give a shit, they don’t give us any money, they don’t dah, dah, dah. So…
E: So there’s a big indigenous community there too so…

H: That’s right. And that was also the target and WAX the youth officer didn’t come from WAX and they are the ones who put in the letter of support for funding for it.

E: So really the capacity building, I mean that’s an example to use regarding what kind of services you do provide these groups; it’s capacity building because you go in and they might not have that name for that, or the terminology, or the particular understanding, but they’re aware that you’re going in saying, ‘how about working on this guys, it’s not working.’

H: It’s a combination of them coming to us, an individual coming to us, and then another individual coming to us, and then another individual and you get a picture that there’s a need and a possibility. Then there’s the other side of us being proactive because we haven’t heard anything from that community and saying ‘look what’s happening and what are your needs, and we’re looking at next years program and blah, blah, blah. So looking forward, and together we build a picture of what’s appropriate and where the priorities might be

E: So they’re always aware that there is an agenda…

H: But the issue is developing and maintaining the relationship, and if you don’t have - and I think this is everywhere, the challenge for regional arts program with so few resources, and human resources - is to develop and maintain...I develop relationships – but maintain them and the trust. The expectations that some of these, particular that Local Government has, that’s where the challenge really arises and if you’ve got past the first base and you’re starting to do some positive things, it’s amazing what flows from it. But if you have these you know difficult situations that arise, and these people are sometimes influential in their communities. They might be useless but this person who’s been directly criticized in that report is quite influential in terms of where else she comes. Other people in the community say she’s not very good at what she does, or what she’s supposed to do but that doesn’t matter. It’s about the relationship so…

E: Do you think, I kind of suspect only because I’m working in the regional community arts practice, but across the divide and in the cities and metropolitan areas it’s a different focus and a different emphasis, I mean it really is about relationships here

H: I think the issue of relationships is universal, absolutely universal

E: In regional areas, I mean it’s make or break

H: It’s just harder to maintain geographically. We’re based here in Bathurst. It’s 2 hours plus to Wellington, I can’t go there every day. I can’t go to Forbes everyday and they have so little infrastructure so we’re kind of seen by the Councils as delivering something that is just impossible. In some instances, they really do want to see us as being hands on. We do need to go back and forward then, put more emphasis there. But
then you’ve got a Council like Bathurst or Orange that are paying 5, 6, 7 times more you know how would they feel if we spent 6 months only in the small communities. They do tolerate, and they do see their role as subsidizing an aspect of the smaller community development; they actually acknowledge that. But nevertheless they’ve got a right to get their fair share of the action so to speak.

E: So out of the funding that you do see the groups that do get funding, which groups typically do get funded, like just typically, generally?

H: What type of funding are you talking about?

E: I suppose I’m looking at the community groups that would apply like there’s sport, recreation groups, performing arts, visual arts, generally…

H: Well um, if I think about the last couple of years’ rounds of funding that have gone out through CASP - please keep in mind CASP is $1,000, $1500 and less, very small amounts o.k? And they’ve gone to a couple of specifically arts based groups like Canowindra Arts Network. But I have to say that quite broadly the applications come from P&C’s like Corinella a tiny small community in Forbes Shire, to have a sort of drama workshops for their kids and for the adults working with them, so it’s after school but it’s in a way it’s under the auspice of the school too. But the school can’t apply, that’s why the P & C apply and also that the P & C is very active. So a P & C can auspice through to women’s health…it’s amazing how many other service organizations apply. The galleries well in certainly here and Cowra have, Reconnect other community organizations that are in part government funded and the reason why these people are applying is because that’s what they do, they look for money to deliver not just the service, because this is not necessarily their core service, but to include an Arts based activity within their outcomes. So interestingly Community Arts is rarely about art, it’s usually about the arts being an aspect of community development which organizations NGO’s service organizations, volunteer run organizations see as important to their communities.

E: For instance, the example that you mentioned that has an arts component…

H: Well for instance, one of the CASP funded projects last year was the Waganbirra dancers to bring descendants dance group members, this is an Aboriginal Dance Company and Aboriginal Cultural practice company that is based in Sydney, in Botany, to bring 1 or 2 members; I think they wanted to have a guy and a girl because they wanted to train up the girls- come in to work with these young women and boys to develop dance performance, traditional contemporary, but traditional dance performance. They had some of the money through Reconnect, the school was doing some of the work. So this allowed for helping to pay for an outsider to come in and it was run, or was coordinated and the funding for it was going through Reconnect. And Kelly does work with families and youth, and youth at risk and that sector including young aboriginal children and families, and young people; and so that was them managing that and adding value. The funding has to go against others because the project was worth $30,000 and this was just a very small component in terms of the
money of it, the funding that we could make the recommendation for. But the outcome went into NAIDOC week celebrations and, oh actually it came through not NAIDOC week, it was for Reconciliation Week when they, one or the other I can’t remember. And they performed in the High School and went on as a result because now there was a group and they want to continue, and they had a young teacher from one of the smaller schools around Cowra, Goolagaong or somewhere else, young mother beautiful aboriginal woman, Berenice young woman’s group coordinator. Then this other boys, man Tom Lewis I think his name is, for the boys. Now Tom’s been invited to come in and teach in the school on a regular basis, so that’s continuing. It was so successful. The drama teacher, or one of the teachers in one of the sections of the High School was kind of the background coordinator and organizer of this program because they did it instead of sport or drama or one of those subjects, so it provided a base. They were in school, they had to do it whilst they were in school as well, so there was a bit of a you know…And as a result they went off to Yaamma and they didn’t perform, but they were there to see and to learn from how you know what happens, and how it’s done. So now they’re keen to increase their skills and their performing skills themselves and go off to the preparing either for the spectacular or for next Yaamma or whatever else, and they’ve been asked…and they’ve been invited to do little gigs, and it had really good feedback you know, within the Cowra Shire, and I think one outside Cowra Shire. So you know how these things happen, bit by bit. And our role there isn’t there to organize or sublimate or anything like that, our role as a Regional Arts Organisation is to recognize what they’re doing, congratulate them, support them, provide letters of support for more funding, recommend them to other communities if there’s you know someone’s looking for a dance group to perform. Nyree (Reynolds) rang me the other day and asked me if I know of a dance group and I said ‘In Cowra, there’s that one’ you know. And so we go. Ours is the networking, the assisting, facilitating and advocating for them, and making sure…and I talk to Kellie regularly and I say you know, can I help you so we can get some more activity, not only that, but some of those same girls wanted to sing and they wanted…and a bit more dance and other things, not just Aboriginal traditional stuff but other stuff and when we did the Art Start program there were 2 components; one was circus and one was Hip Hop and they watched a bit from a distance the first day – they were all there the next day. By the end of the day they’d put down a track. They’d written a song and they’d put down a track and this was the name of the little group – they’d formed a group, the whole thing. They were sooo geed up, and it just showed given… providing the opportunity, talent is there. Just the encouragement and can we just continue to make that to happen.

E: So this does tie in with this question, ‘What is your definition of Culture?’ I tend to believe that it’s quite a personal definition, how people see what culture is.

H: I think I’ve been coloured by so many different layers; firstly you know, I’ve trained, I’ve explored with others in my training in arts management what is the definition of ‘culture.’ Then I’ve explored in my role as ‘cultural planner’ acting cultural planner, policy director for a program, developing cultural plans, so looking at everybody else’s definitions and exploring what fits, or doesn’t fit for my seeing of it. But effectively if I were to incapsulate my personal connection to all of those different potential definitions, I most identify where I can say that ‘culture is the making of – is how we engage in our
lives to establish identity, so where we come from, where we are in the world today, and
how we develop practices that best reflect and encapsulates that in the quality of life. So,
if we only drink Coca Cola and listen to crap music through ear phones and that
becomes our culture, then that’s the limit of the culture. If we know not where we come
from, and we know not where to go to with that, then that’s the limitations that we live
with as our culture. It’s not a judgement whether it’s good or bad, it is a culture. And so
for me it’s understanding that people have culture no matter what. There is no such thing
as non-culture. However, in terms of cultural development and the moment you use
some word that provides a descriptor, I see that what we’re engaging in, in this sector,
what we’re engaging in, is providing and working with and in relationship to others,
whether it’s other professionals, children, whoever, with others, to maximize our
opportunity to develop identity. In my view, and that identity is critical to knowing who
we are, and it’s not that it’s an intellectual pursuit it is how we feel about ourselves and
about each other, and that if there’s no development then in effect we become entirely
isolated and the world is really poorer, for us and for the world.

E: Do you have an opinion of how things are going nationally in terms this cultural
identity and who we are?

H: Yeah (laughs)

E: you do. You don’t have to…I mean I’m just ad libbing here. The question is here, but
if you don’t want to respond

H: Well only because it’s a big one. I certainly do.

E: we’re going down hill, or spiraling somewhere…

H: What I’m really concerned about is that we are trying to, and this is a wave that has
been before as well, so backwards in the sense that it’s a déjà vu. But if we can…and the
media and the rush of the communication age, allows us to communicate opinions of
identity and therefore build proposed collective understanding of, based on prejudice.

E: Because only certain people get to speak, and we’re only hearing…

H: That’s one side of it. That’s one side of it. But the people who are speaking are quite
calculated, and who’s voices are being heard, not just who’s speaking, because there are
a lot of people who are speaking. But the voices who are being heard loudest through
populist culture, are pursuing very simplistic views of how the world should be, firstly.
And secondly, there…it’s almost a calculated…I think personally it’s quite a calculated,
very deliberate seeding of, ideas so that those who are in power can maintain power, and
those that will never have power, will never have power. So, from that set of
relationships, you are constructing identity based our what that power base has
determined, rather than what we as individuals and as small groups of communities
determine.

E: So cultural development is related to that issue…
H: And also, that it has no…it doesn’t allow, it doesn’t really allow for anything like what used to be known as democracy. Nor does it allow for, or promote in the current mode, a true a true…range, not just of tolerance, but open acceptance of diversity. And by limiting that, we become poorer for it.

E: So do you see that role is linked in to that kind of notion that minimizing cultural definition to a really narrow perspective of the world, does actually impact on how you provide, or how you do your role?

H: Absolutely, and every day I come across people who question…I mean even last night, there was this ‘should we be called…seemed a bit narrow, artists…and trying to promote that artists are in all the arts. But the visual artists only see themselves as artists, and performers sometimes don’t see themselves as artists. And I thought that was pretty poor on the part of those who were there. I thought they would have been more enlightened. But I’ll go with the flow, it’s not my problem.

E: What did they decide to call themselves…

H: Just arts in general. Yeah, arts networking. But it was also quite deliberate that we and that Fiona’s idea was very much about those who were doing stuff, the artists. I mean Mary…from the Bathurst Arts Council being there and driving a particular agenda is one thing. In a way that can contribute, that’s almost creating a vessel for the artist to work into, and that’s fantastic. You know, I wouldn’t deny it, a place in that, or that idea there. But the whole idea was that it’s, that it’s a forum, it’s a space in which people can share ideas.

E: So really there isn’t a division between those people who see themselves as artists, and those that don’t see themselves as artists. So there shouldn’t be a divide to separate…

H: That’s why they wanted the word ‘Arts’ so that it could be inclusive of all those that wanted to be. But there’s another really severe divide out here, and that hampers our work full stop. And I don’t know, it just goes on and on and on and on. And that is that the arts are not for me...that the rural person is not necessarily interested or engaged in the arts. From the day I arrived here and I went out talking to people, I said you know ‘the moment you switch on the radio in the morning. The moment you hear the news, you are engaged in consuming an arts or creative product. Someone has written that script, has put it together, has compiled a program. There’s music in it. Every piece of music is an artistic act. You are consuming the arts from the moment you turn the radio on in the morning.’ So I try to get them at that level so they can think just a little bit outside the square. Going to the Opera. A piece of Theatre. They don’t even see the Cinema you know, Movies as the arts. The movies are separate again. You’ve got to continually reinforce the messages and try to help people to just…even if one of those thoughts just help to change a little bit. And that’s actually one of the last major things I wanted to say. That, I really do see our role, as being, working with others, as agents of
change. And if we can, through our work, just influence that change just a tiny bit in a set of individuals…

E: One of them being, broadening the concept of ‘what art is.’ So that’s one aspect…

H: Exciting somebody to participate when they weren’t participating. Um, providing, you know, an opportunity just to get involved in something in which they wouldn’t otherwise. Now, that happens in diverse ways. And then you’re starting to talk about a community. It’s about, you know, here’s a husband and wife between you and Jon. Jon would probably never end up at a community music gig except that he’s dragged along by you. And in the end he’s enjoying it, he’s part of it, and he’s singing whether he can sing or not, you know.

E: O.K I’ll make this the last question. How would you define ‘community?’

H: Community is wherever there are two or more people who have got a common set of values, activity, reason to be doing something together. That’s community. And…we use the word ‘community’ way too liberally. And I’m an offender as much as everybody else. I have to take full responsibility. I was confronted with that, now 18 months ago when I was having a conversation with a leading indigenous person, over the phone…

End of tape

Note (checked by Hannah)
Hannah was ready to finish the interview at Q. 11 How Would you define ‘Community?’ as she gave exhaustive answers to the previous questions, and we had agreed that she give me time for this interview from 3:00pm until at the latest 5:00pm. There are 26 questions in my RADO Interview schedule. I was unaware of my mini disc tape finishing, and therefore did not get the complete recorded response to this last question. However, the point which Hannah made regarding the topic of community was that she learnt early on in her job as Executive Officer of Arts OutWest that her view of ‘community’ had been limiting, as pointed out to her by the indigenous Orange T.A.F.E. worker. He challenged her on her use of the term ‘community’ when she referred to his indigenous community which he criticized as being her definition and not one that he had arrived at himself. As a result of this exchange, Hannah has modified her view of ‘community’ to mean a group which defines itself, where the definition is self generating from the group members themselves, and not as prescribed by those outside the group.
III. Bruce Raw Transcript

Bruce Fitzpatrick, General Manager Oberon Council
Interview Recorded in Bruce’s office
8 August, 2006

E: I’ll be asking about community and culture and that’s virtually where I’m going with my research. It’s really about creativity and how people implement that as community members or within their localities. So the study so far has taken me through the different structural organizations that the Arts come under; so there’s the Australia Council, Regional Arts NSW, and then of course you’ve got the local government that supports initiatives like the arts councils. So I will probably talk about those issues. Are you ready to....

B: Yes

E: Ok. Welcome Bruce Fitzpatrick and you’re the General Manager of the Oberon Council?

B: That’s correct.

E: Bruce, how would you describe your role?

B: Well my role as General Manager of the Council is to work with the community to provide all sorts of amenities; quality of life type activities that are not otherwise provided by private enterprise. So from a government perspective, we look after quality of life issues for people such as the amenities they like which is roads and sewage, water – all those basic things, but it also takes you into other areas such as cultural issues such as provision of playing fields, provision of auditoriums where they can conduct plays and sing-a-long and whatever; other things they want to do. We have an opportunity and an obligation I think as a council to provide those facilities to improve the quality of life of people who live in the area and the quality of life of the people who visit the area. So when you get a good cross section of all those sort of things that otherwise would not be provided by private enterprise because you can’t make any money out of it, particularly in a small country area, say Oberon where our population in town is a bit over 3,000, we can’t always provide theatres and things like they can at Bathurst and Orange and Dubbo which are major regional centres. So we have to think about what we can provide and maybe have multiple uses for facilities that are provided and not try and provide too many for everybody’s demands, but actually provide what we can afford and what they can contribute to.

E: Oberon Council has responsibility, because have you just amalgamated with Evans Shire, Burraga is that right?
B: We took over a small percentage of the former Evans Shire which was about 17% of the land mass which included the small villages of Burraga and Mt David. So we picked up population of a couple of hundred extra people into the area. So it’s a small grab from Evans; most of it went to Bathurst Regional Council.

E: With Oberon and the responsibility this Council has for the environs, what does that include in the areas that it incorporates? Black Springs comes under Oberon...

B: Black Springs, O’Connell; we go to just this side of Tarana – Tarana’s actually in Lithgow Council, so we go to Fish River near there. We go out as far as Burraga and Mt David, but we don’t get to Rockley. But our boundary on the southern side is the Abercrombie River which separates us from the Upper Lachlan Council and then around and we take in things like Kanangra Boyd National Park, Kanangra Walls, Abercrombie River National Park, Jenolan Caves – they all come within our area and we don’t quite get to Hampton, we go to the Duckmaloi River on the eastern side and swing around.

E: With the cultural facilities that you were talking about like sporting, does tourism come in to that with Kanagra Boyd and Jenolan Caves? Does the council see that as part of the Oberon cultural landscape?

B: It certainly does now. When I first came here about 13 years ago, this town was centered on farming pursuits, mostly sheep and cattle and also the softwood timber industry. There was a lot of radiata pine plantations growing here back in the ‘60’s and ‘70’s. The industry in Oberon has now developed because those trees have matured, it’s given the factories opportunity to locate to Oberon and develop and build. We have factories here that employ probably 750 people. Now for a small country area like Oberon, that’s a major plus. But it does give us a very weakened position in that we rely very heavily on employment for one industry and if that industry goes bad, well then what’s our fall back? Tourism, we have been developing as the next major one because there is a lot of beauty here that’s been largely untouched and undeveloped that is natural. More than 52% of our local area is unrated that’s because it’s national parks or state forest pine plantations. So we’ve got a lot of greenery, a lot of native wild life, clean rivers, trout fishing in the dam all year round, and trout fishing is normally a seasonal thing; so you can do it all year round here in Oberon. So that’s a real plus for recreational people, and there’s 4 wheel driving and there’s a lot of need for people to ride bikes in a safe environment; push bikes, walking tracks, those sort of things. We’re developing a heritage railway line; there is a railway line between Tarana and Oberon that voluntary closed back in the 1970’s; that is now being re-developed as a walking and riding track and as a heritage rail line. We’ve got funding from the Commonwealth Government to do a first stage re-development of the line from Oberon to Hazelgrove which is about a 5klm stretch. And beside that rail development there is going to be a walking and riding track put in within the rail corridor. So they’re complementary to one another and we hope that people will come here to ride bikes in a safe environment, not competing with trucks on roads or a lot of cars. Fresh air, families can enjoy themselves, and that will bring more visitors to the area.
E: Would the emphasis be on visitors? Is there a policy that council has that is to attract population growth, or is it really about visitors coming from Sydney and having a different experience which is country experience with all the features that Oberon has?

B: Well certainly it’s both. We are going to Country Week again this year for the third year in Rose Hill to promote Oberon as a destination to come and live, rest and play and enjoy themselves and work. And you can do it these days with improved telecommunications – we’ve significantly upgraded telecommunications here with all television receptions and mobile phone etcetera. So broadband access is available as well. We’ve got things like natural gas in the town. Now that’s an usual thing for a small country town like Oberon to have, natural gas, but the timber industry brought that in and we get the benefit of it. So we can bring in industries which can use cheaper forms of heating and of course it’s probably the cheapest form of heating you’ve got, certainly cheaper than electricity and wood and other things that people have traditionally used. So, that’s a plus for us, and our proximity to Sydney; we’re only two and half hours from the heart of Sydney, driving and that’s going to get closer and closer as they upgrade the roads systems more and more. We know that the government has been working on a 15 year program to upgrade the Great Western Hwy, and that’s well and truly progressing and improving the quality of access of people getting to us. We’re also pushing for the re-development of the Bell of Lines road for major access 110km divided highway down into Sydney and then out through by-passing Lithgow, coming out at the Mudgee intersection where it diverts to Mudgee and goes to Bathurst, then you’re on the open road and away you go.

E: How realistic is that to be achievable?

B: It’s very achievable.

E: So it’s a 15 year time line?

B: I would suspect that’s it probably more than like that. I know the people working on it are talking about having something up and going by 2012, but I think that’s a bit premature and a bit unrealistic. One of the real problems we faced in getting the road developed, was that where it exits into the metropolitan area at the moment, you’ve got to wind your way through Windsor, and those sort of places and North Richmond. You need to link up with the new M7, M5 M2 arrangements which are now connected through Walgrove Rd area, and if you get on that access you can get from Penrith to the airport in Sydney in half an hour.

E: Is the State Government behind this? Or is it a push more from local government?

B: We started the push from here with our regional organization of councils which is Central Western region and we see that as a really important route that will open up the area for more transportation and more people to get out into the country, because the coastal routes are now really chock-a-block; accidents on that M3 are just horrendous. They often have major holdups there. The people who are doing this now are Ian McLachlan and he’s got a tri-party organization together of representatives from the Labor Party, the Liberal Party and the National Party: One of the real problems we had
in the beginning was that as you went to talk to a government agency about it or an opposition party, when one of them said ‘Let’s run with this’ the other one said ‘no.’ So it was pretty smart of him to get together and let’s make it a tri-party arrangement where we’re all going down the same path trying to achieve a goal and we can all claim credit when it happens.

E: Is Ian McLachlan the State Member

B: for Lachlan, I think it was Lachlan and that’s just been wiped, he’s losing his seat.

E: As well as Peter Andren

B: Peter Andren’s going to – well it’s going to separate and split it in two.

E: Do you know what this seat is going to actually – are we going to be Macquarie?

B: Macquarie

E: So that’s definitely going to happen?

B: I don’t know. It’s still in the process.

E: There are a lot of people protesting about it and writing letters. It doesn’t appear that people are happy to have their seat carved up in this way.

B: And I don’t think it should be, but I don’t think that’s going to stop the Labor Party from doing it.

E: So you think it’s a given?

B: Yes, Peter Andren’s seat will go further west, and he’ll go out there where there’s nobody and nothing. And Macquarie which will be around Bathurst, which is a traditional Labor stronghold, will become the seat of Macquarie which it used to be many years ago, and so it will shore up Gerard Martin’s seat.

E: And he’s Liberal?

B: Well actually we’re talking about a Federal seat now, so Gerard Martin he’s Labor and he’s State. Peter Andren is Independent

E: and he’s Federal

B: yes and he’s Federal. So if he goes; he might decide to stand for Macquarie and let somebody else stand out there

E: but anything could happen
B: anything. Yes.

E: But what your point is that it is working with all the parties rather than being partisan with one particular party, working

B: together

E: And you’re saying that’s a new development?

B: Well certainly through CENTROC we had a number of mayors from our CENTROC group of councils and they went to meet various organizations. They first went to the State Government and got short shift, and they said ‘no, we haven’t got a priority for that. That’s not an issue for us.’ So then they went to the Opposition – the Opposition started to run with it, and of course then the push was getting stronger and stronger and then of course the party in power decided ‘no, no, no we can’t go down that path’ because they started throwing problems; ‘no we’re funding the Great Western Hwy and that’s it. This is a ridiculous thing.’ They got consultants in to knock it on the head. So you had this conflict and then Ian McLachlan came in and said ‘Look this is always going to be the case with political parties. Let’s get together so we can all claim credit for this.’ And it’s not just ‘oh, we can claim credit’ and they were all opposed to it.’ Now we’re all together working together.

E: So it’s having that key person that drove it rather than everybody being in disparate camps?

B: Yes

E: But it’s having that leader who actually shored up all the differences?

B: Yes, so you had the contacts to go and talk to major people in the trucking industry and say “what are the major issues you are concerned about? You want fast access into Sydney?” He said ‘no, we want a safe road network where our trucking operators don’t have accidents.’ That’s the most important thing for them. So, the design of the whole redevelopment of the Bell of Lines road has been a divided highway, and that’s always been the problem with that M3, is that often it’s not divided and so when the truck has an accident or it slips or whatever, it goes across and other cars going up the other way, they plough into it because they’ve got nowhere else to go. So divided hwy separate movements going in different directions. If they’re doing 100 klm both ways, it’s a 200klm an hour collision.

E: So with this development, is it trying to attract industry as well as tourism and people coming here, and population growth?

B: Yes

E: What type of people are you trying to attract to come to this area? You’ve talked about the softwood industry
E: So that’s the major employer, but do you see there’s room for diversifying?

B: Definitely

E: So what areas are you hoping that people would be attracted to come here to actually develop their own industry or business?

B: Well, we’re looking towards the Sydney metropolitan area, and our marketing strategy is moving home without losing touch, because you can, you’re not that far from Sydney. So you can come from Sydney, 2 hours to Parramatta, you can come from there to Oberon and live and work, but still be able to maintain connection with your family that might still be in Sydney. And you can do it on a regular basis, pretty easy traveling, it’s not that hard. And of course you get the quality of life issues by coming here which we have the fresh air, and we’re a mountain climate. So in the city where you get sweltering heat during the summer and it seems that it’s going to get worse with global warming, you can come here and the temperature is significantly cooler because we’re 3,500 feet up, and more.

E: I’m looking at creative industries and how that ties in with cultural development, so looking at Council; I know it isn’t mandatory to adopt a cultural policy through the Department of Local Government. I think you have to have a Social and Community Plan

B: That’s correct

E: So that’s an imperative, and you need to do that on a 5 year interval. Is it up to Oberon Council how they implement that policy, when you do it?

B: Yes, well we’ve done it. You’ve got a copy of our Social and Community Plan and that’s now been completed. So we now have that as a strategy from which to work forward with. Now it all comes down to funding.

E: Right, this is you, but other councils can actually implement that policy however they want. Or everyone has to do it the way you’ve done it Oberon?

B: No

E: Everyone has their own leeway?

B: That’s right. They have certain headings. You go out and have community consultation, which we’ve done and get ideas from all sorts of groups, particularly the ones the government have identified that are probably a little bit in the minority groups; Aboriginal, non-English speaking backgrounds; youth, women, men, elderly; all of those sort of things. So there are certain headings and targets that we have to address and then
if we want to go beyond that, you can develop cultural plans, you can develop crime prevention plans, and they all link in.

E: Which is an option? Like the cultural plan is

B: not a core function of what we were asked to do.

E: So just looking at that cultural plan, do you see that there’s room to develop a cultural plan, even though it’s not mandatory and you don’t have to do it?

B: Certainly we do see that as an opportunity. It’s a question of how much interest is within your community to get involved. One of the problems we have is that people say to us ‘we need another hall. We need a community centre.’ You have a look around the town and there’s plenty of halls, there’s plenty of community centre type facilities. What’s your description of a community centre? Somewhere where people can go and interact and do what?

E: Are they coming out with anything? Or it’s just a vague catch all?

B: Yes, it’s vague. For instance we’ve got a small group that have persistently been saying ‘why doesn’t the Council buy the Malachi Gilmore Hall across the road?’ It’s a beautiful art deco building, built back in 1937 I think. Was a former picture theatre. It’s currently... the Cob Web craft shop operates from the front, and a fellow operates a wool bale type selling arrangement, and he uses the hall at the back for storing the wool. And he’s keeping it maintained and in good condition and he owns it privately. So the biggest problem we’ve got first up is that it’s not for sale.

E: So the Council can’t actually go ahead with what these people want council to do?

B: But not only that. Council doesn’t actually believe that there’s great need for it

E: For the community centre? Or purchasing...?

B: What are we going to do with it if we purchase it, and what’s the income stream to generate from it to continue to pay for it? Most of these halls become very much a white elephant around the council’s neck in terms of, everybody wants to use it, but nobody wants to pay for it. You’ve got an RSL club up here which is air conditioned. It’s a licensed premises. They’ve got a big entertainment hall in there, and we’ve got a small population base. How many of these type of facilities do we need? And that costs you nothing, you don’t have to hire it, they just provide it, and they make money out of selling drinks and food.

E: It’s accessible to all the public for functions and entertainment, gaming and they have music there, dances and so on?

B: That’s right all of those things they put on, and there’s a bowling green there. But the other thing, there’s also a new pavilion that’s been created in the showground. There
was a grant we got, or the trustees of the showground got way back, and it was $50,000. They were going to lose that unless they did something with it. But they said it wasn’t enough to do anything. So we worked around getting a Centenary Grant to match it, and during the Centenary year, and that gave us the impetus to get the thing done. A lot of voluntary work and we’ve got a facility up there now that will probably accommodate seating for about 300 people. And it’s got new toilets in it, and a big kitchen area.

E: So that’s a community centre if people want to use the facilities?

B: Yes

E: They would need to go through council to have access I suppose?

B: No, it’s privately run. That’s a private Trust. We’re not the trustees of the site. We’d like to be, but the community that have been traditionally there, the private trustee won’t agree to it, so

E: Are there issues of access, if other community groups want to come in?

B: No

E: There’s no problem?

B: No, no you’ve just got to book it through their Secretary of the private trust, of the showground trust. And provided they haven’t got a double booking, you can get a booking there and have a wedding reception or a 21st birthday party. They’ve had black tie balls.

E: So it is being used as far as Council is concerned, so there isn’t...?

B: We use it for our Australia Day celebrations.

E: So there isn’t a gap as far as council can see in terms of having a facility?

B: No

E: It’s up to the community to know what they want to use that facility is what you’re saying?

B: That’s right. Say the Malachi Gilmore Hall, the people have traditionally said ‘we want to go back and have dances there.’ Well, you can have dances at the RSL Club, or the pavilion. If you want to have dances, you have a band and you have a dance. They said we could use it as a picture theatre. Yes ok. There’s a number of issues there. There’s not sufficient toilets, there is insufficient parking – in order to develop it as a theatre you need parking.
E: So there would be statutory requirements that you would have to meet if you wanted to use it for certain functions?

B: That’s right, yes.

E: Do you have an idea or definition of what ‘culture’ means, because everybody has a different idea about this?

B: It could be anything to do with the arts; it could be anything to do with music, acting, plays. Culture I think is something where it’s artistic – and so artists, writers and yet through the library there’s writing and reading books and all of that sort of stuff is certainly catered for in many respects. And of course traditional library usage is changing dramatically these days; more electronics, less books on shelves is what I think they’re talking about now. Using the internet to look up things, you know you can’t carry a book for everything, but the internet seems to be able to carry everything, doesn’t it.

E: Yes, technology is about the knowledge economy in that we’re entering into this new era I suppose. So people who haven’t been able to catch up are going to be left behind, which is I think the way it is in an Australian context. So I suppose looking at a community like Oberon, how well equipped are they to be able to engage with this kind of knowledge economy?

B: Yes, well we’ve got a Community Technology Centre where people can come there and use that. We’ve got people that voluntarily work there – one lady that works there one day a week and another guy who voluntarily gets training programs and helps people to, particularly older people, to come to grips with modern technology that they’ve never been exposed to, and how it works. And of course it then also gives them a social interaction, an outlet for them to get out of their house and go and meet with other people and have interaction with people in a friendly environment. It’s air conditioned. We’ve also got our Visitor Information Centre there, so it’s a nice environment for them surrounded by parkland.

E: From what I understand attendance is good?

B: Well it certainly took a while for people to get to know it’s there, and you’d love to see it being used so much that you just have to increase the thing for the demand, but that’s not the...it ticks along ok, and we’ve been able to keep our costs down because we have volunteers mostly doing it and also it’s part of the Visitor Information Centre and then there are other tenants like the Central West Community College rent a room there. We’ve also got training facilities underneath – we converted the three car garage into a training room, so when people want to have meetings they can hire it out and give training programs to their staff and not everybody has those training facilities available. There’s technology in there with overhead projections and that sort of stuff. So yes, it’s a little bit of a multi used function

E: which works for the needs as they are at the moment?
B: Yes

E: Unless the needs expand, perhaps it might need to be revisited in terms of whether it can cope with an expansion of people coming in and saying ‘I really need to use this service.’ But it doesn’t sound like that’s been happening, it’s working, it’s not being stretched.

B: The reason we got all of the new computers in and the government paid for them with the CTC funding once we got a grant from them to set it up; so all of that new technology was brought in and installed etc but of course it doesn’t last forever. Now when it comes to replace it that’s when it’s going to become a little bit interesting, to see whether or not the usage is strong enough to support a continuation of the council putting money into it.

E: So for Council to actually fund any of these initiatives, are you dependent on having to apply for grants? Is funding a major issue apart from what you collect in rates?

B: Oh definitely

E: Because I know this is with the arts organizations, they are almost completely dependent on grants application, and if they can’t write grants, then they do miss out on the funding because the pool is diminishing and it’s more competitive, so are you finding that what’s happening here as well?

B: Definitely. It’s harder to get things done without getting grants of some description and it’s so complex, the grant...you really have to know how to put it together and you can’t afford to not cross a ‘t’ or dot an ‘i’ otherwise you’re wiped.

E: So where do you source your funding? What kind of grants are available for council to access to develop these facilities?

B: Well for instance, recently we got some from the ATDP program, the tourism program from the Federal Government. We got $100,000 grant towards the development of the walking/riding track and the heritage rail line. We’ve just applied now for further funding from them for about half a million dollars to develop the Abercrombie Rd link down to Goulburn and to Oberon as a Stage 1 of the Tablelands Way which is an alternate route away from the metropolitan area of Sydney to take people from the south coast, well from Melbourne, Canberra and the south coast, come up through this road through Oberon, through Lithgow, out to Mudgee and then up to the Hunter. So you’re not going through, forcing your way through all of that infrastructure in Sydney with trucks and everything else you’ve got to deal with. So the people we’re looking for are the tourists that want to get off the beaten track, the bike riders, the bikie clubs that just love to ride around on roads that are not just dead straight. Tourists like people with Brits Australia that travel around, caravanners..
E: And you find that is the type of people that are coming here and wanting to come here for that reason?

B: That’s right

E: Because they can get on the roads

B: And just take their time and not fight against trucks and other things because they sometimes are a bit more slow moving. But then they see different things. You get off the beaten track – you get on to a freeway these days, where’s your amenity? It’s just dead straight and gets you from A to B in very fast time but you don’t see anything.

E: Have you been successful in that funding?

B: Not yet. We have an application in at the moment to do that, and we’re pretty hopeful.

E: So far you’ve been quite successful applying for the funds that you’ve needed to develop other ventures? Is it a good success rate?

B: There’s a lot of grants out there and you’ve really have to pick and choose and you’ve got to do your homework, and you’ve got to be prepared for it. You just can’t rush in and say ‘Oh, I’d like to put a grant in, I’d like to go for this one.’ You’ve got to justify that you’ve actually thought the thing through. You’ve spent maybe a year or two thinking about this, and talking to the community and you know how much it’s going to cost, and you’ve got answers to all the questions that the funding authorities are going to ask you. And you just can’t do that and say ‘well, that sounds like a good idea. Let’s go and put something in.’

E: So the application isn’t through an association like the Local Government Association. It’s really an independent thing that you need to put together here as the Oberon Council? Do you amalgamate with other organizations?

B: We do. Say for instance the one we’ve applied now for this Tablelands Way scenario, we took the initiative and went down and spoke to representatives from the Upper Lachlan council which is based at Crookwell, and the Goulbourn Council, and said ‘look there’s going to be a benefit – we’ve got special money from the State Government to finish the sealed road network all the way to the Abercrombie River, and there’s only 5 kllms on the other side which is on the Upper Lachlan area.’ Now the member for the Upper Lachlan is a National Party Member, so they get no money because the Labour Party is in power. But Gerard Martin has kindly said, and he’s pushed for us and said ‘look this road is the most important road in his electorate and that 5 kms on the other side is the gap in the chain that needs to be fixed.’ So we’ve had a commitment from the State Govt that they will assist on a 50/50 basis with Upper Lachlan, and Upper Lachlan have agreed to put in 50/50 to get it done.

E: Was that a typical grant application?
B: No. this was representations to the Minister for Roads to fix up a road network infrastructure that was not likely to happen without some special funding. Now we’ve been able to get black spot funding because we’ve had accidents on that road in the past from the Commonwealth Govt with their Black Spot Program. So we’ve added that to it as well.

E: But again, do you have to take the initiative to apply and make representations to get the funding you need?

B: Yes

E: So it isn’t just waiting for the money to come your way?

B: No

E: It’s not State or Federal Govt saying ‘you need to do that’?

B: That’s right

E: So it is your initiative?

B: That one is. Now the other grants we get are standardized grants. We get financial assistance grants which every council in Australia gets from the Commonwealth Govt, and it’s fed through the State to us, and there’s a certain program and a formula which determines where your shortcomings are and where you’re disadvantaged, and you get an allowance figure within the stats and then it’s a multiplying affect on your population or your road length or the number of timber bridges you’ve got.

E: So that’s the formula they apply in how much they give you?

B: That’s right. And if we tried to say ‘look we’re disadvantaged here because of this,’ and they say ‘well the formula says this, and if we give it to you, we’re going to have to take it off somebody else because we’ve only got so much in the biscuit barrel.’ So we have to keep arguing with the Commonwealth Govt for more money under their grants schemes as a bucket, but then the formula can still apply and we can all get a benefit

E: Are you saying that as time has gone by that that’s become a diminishing amount of money?

B: It definitely has

E: It’s become more competitive?

B: Yes

E: And you’ve had less to go around to the different competing groups?
B: That’s right. Now what’s happened in the past when they first introduced fuel excise, I think 75% of the fuel excess excise was to be returned for roads into the various organizations to do it. Now there’s about 12 ½% that comes back, and the rest of it is hived off by the government to spend on other government related issues. I just see it as another tax.

E: It seems to be a highly contentious area at the moment because people are saying ‘why is this fuel levy there especially when petrol prices are going up?’

B: But they’re relying on it to go let go of it. I think what you’re saying is that you have to fight your way to get your voice heard and to get the services you believe in. Council would need to believe in certain projects and ventures to be able to put itself in the line and say ‘no, well we’re going to really push for this.’ So things that you don’t see as a priority. I suppose it comes back to what are the key areas that have been identified by the community, giving their input to this Social/Community Plan? What are the key areas that have been identified that you and council see as the priority areas?

B: Age Care.

E: Is that the respite Home?

B: There’s a range of different Age Care things depending on who you are and how old you are and what your needs are. One of the shortfalls we’ve got at the moment is a Nursing Home. We don’t have one. So we have people that are old that have lived here all their life that need a nursing home type care and they have to leave town to go to Bathurst or Lithgow or somewhere else where they can get a bed, if you can get a bed. It’s a growth industry in terms of providing these things, but the Commonwealth Govt has a responsibility to provide beds, and the State Govt has a responsibility to provide infrastructure. Now, State Govt is not meeting its targets and they’re trying to restructure their health system and it’s really in a shambles; it’s not real good. Federal Govt say ‘we’ll provide the beds if the State provide infrastructure.’ So there’s a constant fight about doing it. Now, what’s happening at the moment is that there’s certainly a groundswell of public opinion about doing something about this, and there’s people pushing for a public meeting to happen here in Oberon probably in about 4 weeks time, to see what can be done to move our case forward, because statistically we are below the par in terms of the number of beds per head of population which is what everybody uses in what you should be doing. So, we’ve got to think of a different strategy and how we overcome that. Now, one of the things is a) have we got a site where we can actually build a Nursing Home and we have identified something just recently that’s flat, and that’s within the town; it’s under utilized and it’s owned by a government agency, the land. So that’s one part of it, getting an appropriate site that would be good for what we want to do. Second part is who’s going to fund it? And the third part is who is going to manage it when it’s built? Now, the funding of it; normally nursing homes are provided by private enterprise through organizations such as the Masonic Club, the Knights of the...
Southern Cross which are a Catholic based organization, and other private enterprise operators like the Moran family who have been doing a lot of these developments. Now, it’s a question of trying to get one or more of those organizations to believe in Oberon enough to say ‘well if you can provide us with a site, yes we’ll come and build it and then we’ll manage it.’ And then of course the way they manage it is that the money they get...when you go into a nursing home, you’re on a short time frame towards your finished life. So what they say is that it’s a five year structure, they’ll say you’ve got to put in $130,000 or something or other, which probably means you’ve nearly got to sell your house or find it some other way, and then they’ll take a percentage of that each year for 5 years. They also take the pension of the person involved, so that pays for the needs, and they then manage and run it. And say you pass away within 12 months, well that’s all you pay, you don’t end up paying for the whole $130,000 – you get that back

E: as in the family?

B: within the family, yes. The family might have a house and they may say ‘no, let’s keep it and rent it, and we’ll just pay the equivalent amount.’ Because all they’re relying is, you give us $130,000 we put it in the bank, we get interest on it, so they’re generating interest on that money in order to pay for it, plus the pension.

E: So those groups aren’t here to be able to initiate and keep this key area working? So are you saying those groups aren’t operating in Oberon, you have to attract them here?

B: We’ve got to bring them in, that’s right. First of all we’ve got to find a block of land, which I think I’ve done. But then I’ve got to convince the government agency to sell it, or to let it be used for that.

E: So that’s the first step.

B: First step, yes. Talk to those people, the person at the lower level, take it to the regional level, take it to the state level, until you get up the top. Because if you don’t go from the bottom up, you go to the top and come down, you’re going to find obstructions in the middle. You’ve got to work your way through a process. But I think it’s achievable: I’ve taken the first step and the first person I’ve spoken to is supportive of it, and will take the matter forward to the next couple of stages, as an idea, and we’ll see where it goes. The other one is getting one of these organizations to come in and build one. Now, I’ve spoken to David Mather and Haver Hand and Mather which is a firm of architects in Bathurst. Our local solicitor has just put his father into a nursing home recently and I said ‘what do you know about these things?’ And he said ‘well, Haver, Hand and Mather, that’s what their core business is; they design nursing homes and their building them, they’re designing them all over the state.’

E: They don’t fund them, they just design them?

B: That’s right. But they know the people who are actually in the business of doing it. And I’ve spoken to him and said ‘can you get somebody that you think will be reliable
to come and talk to us?’ so we find out exactly what we can do and what’s our likelihood. So once again, starting from the ground and working our way through the maize and if we can get private enterprise organization to come in and do it, because they’re in it to make money. That’s all they’re in it for. And they might be using superannuation funds for instance, which is not needed for a quick return investment, but as a long term return, and that’s what nursing homes will provide you.

E: So this sounds like a really long term plan?

B: Yes

E: If the community and you often read in the local paper that this is a priority area and people are crying out for it, do they understand that there are strategies to be met and it is very long term?

B: I think they do because previously we had a community consultation process and we had a committee of 30 people which was far too big to try and work out government “what can you do for us? Let’s run a raffle.” I thought, that was the best idea they could come up with! Let’s run a raffle? These things cost millions of dollars to build.

E: Do they understand that your position is to manage and find the best ways that are sustainable and that will work? I’m trying to work out whether the community understand what council actually does, and I do understand that in certain areas there are key individuals who are community, and they tend to be the drivers

B: Yes

E: and they will engage with what council does and they will take initiative and responsibility in looking at financing and other things, so does this happen in Oberon, or is it more that the community look to council to do and fix things, rather than they actively engage in the process?

B: We actively engage that’s for sure. One of the problems we had when I first came here is that we didn’t have a Business Association that was active. So I went and became the Secretary of a new Business Association for 12 months to help them go through the process of getting them established and registered as an incorporated body and all of those things that they didn’t have an understanding about how to do that. So we worked together and I’m pleased to say that I got lots of criticism to say ‘we’ve tried this before. It will last for about 3 years, then it falls over.’ Anyway, it’s still going, it had a bit of a crisis. There was a change of membership needed. But Peter Stokes has taken over the chairmanship; he’s come into the town as a blow in, and the blow ins actually do a lot of things within new communities. He’s now President of the Business Association. It hasn’t fallen over. Fresh blood has come in. And now they’re looking at different things. So that’s good and we’ll continue to work down that path.

E: I was interested to see that the ‘blow ins’ was part of, I’m not sure if it was actual individuals that actually said that the local population needs to be looked after, and the
new arrivals...which came up, and I was interested in reading that. So, people like Peter Stokes, he’s a quote ‘blow in’ but he has managed to get involved in the local community and be effective?

B: Well, he’s invested in the town. He owns...

E: So he’s respected?

B: Well, I’m not sure yet. He’s still a bit new, and it takes a while in a small country town, over a period of time...people sit back and watch and wait, until you show your true colours: you’re either genuine or you might find out that this person’s just here for their own pocket, and they’re not really interested in the community at all. And the community then will turn on them.

E: Because I think there’s another definition of ‘culture’ and that is that there is a culture of exactly what you are talking about, which is something that is not spelt out. Oberon would have its own culture of how the community operate. What’s your opinion of that?

B: Well, Oberon when you look back at Oberon’s history, it was certainly a backwater; it was a cold inhospitable climate. A lot of people that came into this area probably back in the early 1800’s were convicts that had escaped, and they probably made their way up through... before the Waragamba Dam was there of course, there was a traveling stock route through the Baragarang Valley, or they came up from Goulburn and that way. You couldn’t cross the Blue Mountains; it hadn’t been discovered at that stage. So a lot of people came up the back way and started farming, like peasants, the Irish, the Welsh; a lot of those sort of people. A few of them were outlaws and prisoners trying to hide away from the law. So that was the basic starting point for it. And it was because it was pretty hard to get around here, horseback was probably the best, only way you could move. There were no roads, and it’s been a bit of a backwater. And if you weren’t coming to Oberon, you didn’t come on this road, you went straight down the Great Western Highway from Lithgow to Bathurst.

E: So it was isolated from the main routes, the roads were going elsewhere but not here?

B: Yes

E: So the people that came here needed to be hard to be able to survive the conditions?

B: My word, yes. And they had all sorts of problems like liver fluke because the cold climate would kill the sheep and it wasn’t until they came up with a cure for liver fluke that the stud sheep farms then became successful, and they’re successful at doing that and cattle now. Timber has been a big plus for us too, because that’s created an industry that we didn’t have other than farming pursuits.

E: So this idea of a cultural policy and whether we actually need a cultural policy; I don’t know whether it’s been discussed here, but just in terms of how people are talking about it, is like ‘who are we?’ It’s like what is our identity in terms of how people do
view themselves in these country towns, because they do go back to generations, probably folklore in how people understand how they fit into the community. Do you see that this is an important discussion that is needed, like a soul searching thing we haven’t done in terms of a policy, to say what are our values, and how do we identify?

B: Well, we’re going more down the path now of heritage officers and heritage things to see what heritage we’ve got. When you first come here you might look around and say, ‘well there’s hardly any notable buildings.’ You might have Ramsgate which was wonderfully restored 2 storey place. You might have the Royal Hotel, you might have a couple of others, but you couldn’t identify many without thinking about it. Since engaging a part-time Heritage Officer, she’s gone around and identified a whole heap of heritage items that most people would not even recognize.

E: Not necessarily buildings?
B: Not necessarily buildings.

E: Is it landscape?
B: Landscape yes. Like the first crossing of the Blue Mountains and went up through O’Connell. And O’Connell has got some old pise [pronounced pisay; early buildings made of wattle and daub or slabs from local timber] buildings there that were still in existence

E: Pise is...?
B: Pise is like mud brick buildings with wattle daubed things on them. And they’ve identified a precinct in and around the O’Connell area of some of these old sites, and how old they are. There’s Sidmouth Valley property which is 100 and something years old, I don’t know how old it is. But that was the original route from Bathurst to Sydney, was the coal wood road that ran through O’Connell until they built the Great Western Hwy which then moved things away. So, that’s an historical road in its own right.

E: Recognizing these heritage factors that were probably overlooked because people weren’t looking at them, is that part of identifying locally how the community actually operate and what their cultural values are? I mean, is heritage being recognized because Council has appointed a person to look at this area?
B: We’re just going through an interview process where we’ve selected a Heritage Advisor who is a specialist in assisting councils and other people in developing streetscapes that are consistent and helpful to one another, so that you are not destroying what was a streetscape of consistency by allowing inappropriate development right next door to it that’s overpowering because it’s a 2 storey building when in fact you’ve got a lot of bungalows running through it
E: I think you mentioned the Malachi Hall here, so would that be recognized as a significant place because it has historical significance and meaning for the local people?

B: Yes

E: So you wouldn’t go in and say ‘let’s put a high rise there’

B: That’s right, no you wouldn’t do that.

E: That does answer the question ‘what are the cultural values?’ I think people know what they are, but they may not be expressed, so that people aren’t necessarily saying ‘we see that as a significant site.’ So perhaps this process that council has undertaken is doing that by just recognizing that. So even though it’s not being written anywhere in terms of a policy that says local community should recognize their heritage sites of significance, the heritage sites, it’s something that councils are taking on as their own initiative, or...?

B: No, I think most of this is coming from the community in that they feel that there’s a need. There’s always a small nucleus of people who have a strong interest in things, and they’re often quiet achievers that you don’t notice. A fellow like Barry Webb who goes around maintaining isolated cemetery sites all over the place and developing garden beds up around the museum which was the old railway station. He just doesn’t...we made him citizen of the year previously, but he just doesn’t...he’s a quiet

E: He’s not after the recognition.

B: He doesn’t want to go on a committee, he wants to do things. He’s got a huge black and white film collection of things all around Oberon. Wonderful asset for us to keep. We hope it doesn’t get destroyed once he passes away. They’re all the old shots that we’ve got. If you go down to Soby’s video shop where he does photography work, he’s got all sorts of old shots of Oberon buildings that have primarily come from people like Barry Webb. They’ve got a great collection of these things. And of course that’s an historic collection of history of the area as it was, streetscapes and things like that. So those sort of photographs are invaluable.

E: So he feels the need personally to do this. Now why he is motivated is anyone’s guess because he doesn’t want recognition so it’s not about that.

B: That’s right

E: Some people might call that a creative spirit, because of recognizing things that have no monetary value, where things are going the way that everything is required to be measured economically. From what you’re saying there are key drivers, people who you would call cultural practitioners for want of a better word, who take on initiatives themselves because they see that there’s a need, but they’re not getting paid to do it, sometimes out of their own pocket
B: out of love because they want to do it, because they can see that our history is being lost over time as modern buildings are being built and we’re going ahead in such a fast pace in terms of the history of the world, we’ve never been accelerating this quick in developing things – it’s hard to keep up with

E: Do you think it’s part of the Australian character that we do hark back to the heroes and the larrikins, like we have an idea about ourselves historically in how we were founded in that there was a spirit forged in mateship. I think there is an identity that people like to feel that they’re connected to which is our past. So these historical areas that people want to maintain and recognize, would that be part of the Australian identity that we don’t know how to talk about?

B: It is difficult because things are changing so quickly. My brother who’s in his seventies, he’s a bit older than me, he was born in the ‘30’s and he said to me one day ‘the true blue aussie, you had to live in the ‘30’s to understand what true blue aussie was.’ And rhyming slang, that’s gone by the... but you found that when I was a kid. It’s out there but not much anymore. But that was a part of our culture we shouldn’t let go.

E: Are we being exposed to too much globalised, americanised...Is that what’s threatening where people are saying ‘we need to recognize our own culture?’

B: I think so and because of the multicultural swing away from the white Australia policy, we’ve got all sorts of cultural things that have been a wonderful benefit to us. The foods in particular and the way the people cook their foods and bring their traditional recipes. And we have got all of the resources like the right weather conditions for growing these many variety of food types. You got to Ireland and they only grow potatoes, and not much else.

E: Are people taking up these opportunities to grow crops that are exotic?

B: Oh certainly. Organic growing of foods is becoming very popular and in demand.

E: Is that happening here?

B: Not so much here, we’re a colder climate so we’ve got a shorter growing period. But when you look at Australia per se, a lot of the hotter climates, they can grow all sorts of things. Look how quick the bananas are coming back in terms of the banana trees after they’d been massacred by that cyclone, it’s not over yet. But the trees grow so quickly in that climate. They’ll be producing bananas before you know it.

E: So it is incorporating people who come here and who are diverse; I know that was part of the Social/Community Plan, so it is incorporating different ways of life when they do come here. They have got different cultural values than that iconic Australian...

B: That’s right which is based on the British Empire and the Queen and all that, which this multicultural scenario I think might have been a deliberate attempt by the government when they started it, and I think it was a Labour Government that started it,
probably won’t say which one started it, Keating I think, started to bring in more people from non-English speaking backgrounds in here to give a different cultural identity to what we have. And that’s broadened...Because I lived in Canley Vale where the dumping ground was for all of the migrants coming in from the second world war when Russia was invading all those countries in Europe and they were coming over

E: as refugees

B: so I was brought up with people like Hans Zecovic and Joe Mascovitch and all of these people

E: footballer names

B: Yes. But because I grew up with them, those kids that came at that young age when I was in primary school, they’ve grown up now to be Australians, and they haven’t got all of the hang ups from the problems of the past. Their parents did, and of course generationally they lose it. They still maintain a loose connection. With a name like mine, Fitzpatrick obviously there’s an Irish connection on my father’s side, but it’s not strong because I’d be multi-generational Australian, but you still have an affinity with the Irish because you have an Irish name. I think things are moving quickly, and changing from what was traditionally the iconic Australian lay back bronzed aussie ‘how’re you going mate’ easy going, nothing’s impossible, to something far more complex and complicated and diversified.

E: And possibly this is what has caused some of the issues, where communities are needing to address, like cultural diversity in a place like Oberon. Is it a good thing that there are different views, world views?

B: I think it is. We were very isolated in terms of being at the bottom of the southern hemisphere. Most of the known world and the developed world is in the northern hemisphere. So we felt a cultural cringe, and now we’ve got a lot of people coming here from all sorts of countries. We had to populate or die. And so bringing people in from other countries was one way of doing that. People aren’t having as many children any more.

E: But do you think that there’s a need for a proper policy that actually delineates these areas of what Australian culture is, and whether it needs to be protected in some way, with all these challenges which are globalization and those kinds of things?

B: Yes I do because we’ll lose it. It’s already been lost. It’s being faded away and people generationally are changing. I mean a ridiculous thing I heard just yesterday was some kids are not allowed to kick footballs around at school anymore in some of the schools, because it’s an OH & S issue.

E: Is this in Oberon?
B: No, Broken Hill I think was named as was one place and another place more nearby... is ‘no we can’t have kids running around unsupervised kicking a football because somebody might get hurt. Somebody might fall over. Somebody might bump into them, then they’ve got an injury, and then we’ve got this O H & S issue.’

E: This litigiousness that’s come in need to insure for anything in terms of a business it’s a priority and when you try to work it into a community, they really can’t do anything in community development without looking at insurance. Is that part of what’s being lost? Is there fear of ‘we’re going to be sued and people are going to be hurt.’ Is it the fear of being sued?

B: I think it’s really bad because they’re handing over the power and control to the kids. The teachers and the parents and the police who are traditionally the mature people who had the responsibility to look after people’s interest have had their power taken away from them. We’ve never stopped kicking the police up the backside for years. No wonder there are so many of them on stress leave, sick leave and everything else.

E: Do you think that lawyers are exploiting the fact that they can?

B: It was, but that’s been changed. The State Government did something because there was such an outcry. NSW I think was the second worst litigious place for public liability in the world. It was a shocker. So they brought legislation in that virtually said ‘right Mr Solicitor, if you’re going to tout for business and take people to courts knowing that you’ll always get a pay out because of the insurance issues...You got into court without a sensible argument to put, you’re going to get done, and then you’re going to have to pay their costs, and their solicitor’s costs etc., because you’re the one that’s causing the problem.

E: So there have been regulations put on the lawyers?

B: That’s right and they pulled back. And we haven’t had anywhere near the amount of people falling over in streets, like it’s died.

E: That was an initiative taken by this State Government?

B: It wasn’t an initiative. It was a response to the community jumping up and down saying ‘we’ve had a gut full of this. No more.’

E: So the community going to State Government and their responding to...?

B: Governments aren’t pro active, they’re re-active.

E: Again, there would be key people. It wouldn’t be local councils that would make this representation. It would be key people in different communities that would go to State Government and say ‘this is just not on’
B: Yes. There’s a ground swell that emerges. Your shock jocks. And the radio programs constantly saying ‘look we’re getting people saying they can’t hold an event because they can’t get insurance because you just keep saying the insurance company will pay for it; well they can’t keep doing that. Premiums just go up then insurance companies fold.

E: So community does have a voice. They’re not powerless, they are able to be heard and the government will react. But who is speaking for the community and has the ability to be heard, so in other words people like the shock jocks who are very powerful, but there are others who represent the community’s concerns and they go to the powers that be who can legislate. Is what you are saying that communities can have a voice as long as they mobilize in some way, or can be heard through a person who represents a major interest who aren’t in government, authority?

B: Governments are interested in staying in power, and governments are interested in getting in to power. And the ones that are in power will try to address the issues that are seen as a threat to them because the community are saying ‘we’re sick of this, and do something about it, otherwise we’ll get rid of you and put somebody else in and see if they will do something.’

E: Do you find that happens in Oberon, that there is a community voice that says to council ‘we’re not really happy about this and we’d really like for instance the Nursing Home’ is one issue. Does that happen at a local government, that Council is put on notice?

B: It does. We’re going through a Local Environmental Plan at the moment: About every 8 years the government says you’ve got to do a new LEP and we’re going through that process, but it’s a long winded process, and it’s a lot of consultation and it’s a lot of mucking around. Then the government and their various agencies want to force upon you the local community who is supposed to be the planning authority, rules and regulations and restrictions about what you can or can’t do with your land. Now that means we have to fight tooth and nail with them to get those sort of restrictions modified so that we can grow and develop and become the community that we think it should be, and provide land for expansion of residential, rural residential, industrial, commercial; all of that and identify where they are. But a lot of State Govt policy has an affect. Say for instance Wind Farms is a key issue here and up in the mountains; the governments now have taken a lot of those wind farms over and have said ‘we’ll provide the approvals’ and they disregard the local community. So while the council is the consent authority, the local community could come to the council. The council would then address and take note of them, because they vote them into power. And also that they live here and we say ‘well we don’t necessarily want these bloody monstrosities. Put them at Kernell. Well Bob Carr said there’s none going at Kernell.

E: So they’re not listening to the people on the ground is what you’re saying?

B: That’s right
E: So there is this problem that is not going away in that the authorities make decisions for the local people regardless of what they want.

B: Because they’ve got the power because they can bring in legislation; the Local Government Act is an Act of State parliament. If they repeal that we don’t exist. So that’s the sort of power they’ve got. We have nothing under the Constitution that recognizes local government. So it’s a tricky scenario but the State Government is the one that really does have so much power, it can do whatever it wants, and if it sees that local governments are constantly refusing these wind farm developments for instance because they think they’re an eye sore, and they don’t want them and they don’t see any real benefit to them, the government can override them and say we’ll take control of the development approval. We’ll approve it. You can put your submissions in, we’ll ignore them and we’ll do what we want to do, for the common good.

E: And if people do want to protest, they can but it’s a difficult procedure.

B: That’s right. And it’s falling on deaf ears. If they’ve got their mind made up that that’s going to happen, you’re wasting your time.

E: Just looking over the topics I wanted to discuss, I am looking at whether you have a personal vision of cultural development in this region?

B: I haven’t got something that I can encapsulate and say this is what we should do. I think it’s up to the community where they have a special interest and a desire to do something, we can provide assistance to help them go through that process. For instance Marj Armstrong a former Mayor of the council here and is a local businesswoman, was very keen to do something about getting the graves in the cemeteries properly marked with a plaque, indicating who’s there and everything else. Because a lot of them are unmarked and never been, or the headstones have worn away over the years, and they wanted to do a research of what was there etcetera. So they’re going through this, and it’s all been done voluntarily. Although I see that as a very strong cultural thing, that’s restoring our heritage, and then you can develop a cemetery trail.

E: Like a tourism attraction.

B: That’s right you can get a bus load of people and do a cemetery trail, because a lot of people like to go back and look at old things.

E: It is historically significant. So she’s taken that on as something that she believes in and she is pursuing

B: And she’s mobilized a sub-committee around her and the Council’s supporting that group, and we’ve got the old information in here of the cemeteries that we have responsibility for. There are some private cemeteries that some of the churches look after, and there are on private property that nobody looks after and those sort of ones need to be properly identified and marked and preserved.

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E: And that group is doing that?

B: And they’ve got a strong interest. It’s the interest that’s the issue.

E: And they’re getting your support so that’s important and it’s letting people know that it’s occurring as well, so that people are aware that this is going on.

B: That’s right. And the local Arts Council that’s here that we interact with. They want to do something for the centenary of the council in this current year. There’s a thought of doing some sort of a mosaic in the Common. Fran Charge, the Council has agreed for us to work with them in a number of ways to help them achieve their goal, so she’ll come in and talk to me or others within the organization, and we’ll go through a process of saying ‘alright, what will we do.’ But it’s been driven by the community, not the Council we’re not forcing it upon them. The community’s saying ‘we want this’ and we say ‘alright if you want it, we’ll help you.’

E: Now you actually do support Oberon Arts Council because there’s a payment that goes out to Arts Outwest, Regional Arts NSW?

B: That’s right.

E: So that is something that Council believes is worth supporting, so that is a levy which is paid, which I understand some councils don’t actually pay. But you feel that it is important enough to support the Arts Council in Oberon and what they do?

B: It is. But it’s more than that. It’s a contribution that we put in and they go and publicize and give Oberon some presence as they do with all the other regional groups. They probably spend more time with the bigger centers where they’ve got a lot more cultural activities happening in the bigger centers like Orange and Bathurst and Dubbo. Whereas the smaller towns, they do try and give us as much promotion.

E: You mean Arts Outwest?

B: Arts Outwest yes. The local Arts Councils, it looks at various things. They have various meetings and they talk about what they can do, and they have nights like the Celtic night where Mothers of Invention was a group that came in and played. They’ve been here a few times. We’ve got a terrific small group of actors called Wild Oats who win awards all over the place.

E: So they’re the cultural groups that do exist here

B: That’s right.

E: And as you say they’re initiatives that are driven from grassroots rather than Council saying ‘we should have this happen.’

B: That’s right.
E: And it is really from what you’re saying, that is the best way of going about it. Because the community is saying we want to do this and they will be committed to it. They’ll drive it.

B: Yes. Kowmung Music Festival came in here and wanted to do this. There was a bit of... they got each other off side early on making some comments in the media that were really shooting themselves in the foot. So they didn’t really get too much support from the Council thereafter. But they nevertheless got money from the State Government.

E: My understanding is that they actually didn’t run the festival this year

B: There was a death in the family or something

E: But will they continue running that festival through State Government?

B: Yes. I don’t know that the State Government will continue to provide them funding every year

E: So they will need to find their own funding. So Council’s not going to obstruct what they do?

B: No, not at all, and we’ll advertise. Just recently, prior to this year, when they did run one, we agreed to sell tickets for them at the Visitors Information Center for a commission. So we helped out in that regard. But there is a nucleus of people that really enjoy that sort of stuff, other people couldn’t care less about it, but that’s fine. They can go and listen to rock and roll at the pub.

E: Well, thankyou very much for your time today Bruce.
IV. Lesley Raw Transcript

Lesley Atkinson, Director Community and Cultural Services Bathurst Regional Council
Interview recorded in Lesley’s office
28 August, 2006

Elizabeth: I’m with the Lesley Atkinson the Bathurst Regional Council Community and Cultural Services Director. Have I got the title right?

Lesley: Yes, it’s a bit of a mouthful. This is a brand new position. It’s only been in the structure for 12 months. The previous person that was in this position really only had it as part of the re-structure when they combined Bathurst and Evans Shires. And the person that was in this position really was only put into the position more as a way of transferring them from one Council to another, because he was retiring and so he moved into this position and the way that I describe it, is pretty much in a caretaker role. So for me coming in it’s really just been about creating, I’m really creating the position in the way that I would like it to be because I’ve had the opportunity to do that because it’s a new thing in the structure.

E: Did the position have a title for the person before you?

L: Same title, but in reality, all that they did was; their focus was very much on moving the Evans Shire staff over to Bathurst Regional Council and settling them, and that was a significant thing, because they had very different employment roles, employment conditions were very different: A little Shire with only about 40 staff, not a big service provider. So his role was very much in a caretaker capacity. And so I’ve been really fortunate because the existing cultural services team truly hasn’t worked as a team; they’ve been very independent, they’ve been out of sight out of mind from Local Government which isn’t an unusual thing for cultural services, or services external to the actual building which can often be seen as appendages or nuisances out there in the field where there’s very little interest. So for me, the opportunity now is about creating that team and about getting that joint planning happening because they have all been extremely sound services. So we’re talking about an Entertainment Centre; a Museum; the Fossils Museum; the Libraries and the Art Gallery and then we also have Ben Chifley’s home which is a house museum. So we actually own that. And then the other things that Council does... is this the sort of thing you want to know?

E: Yes, I was going to ask about the cultural services that Council runs so that’s virtually what it is?

L: It’s the 4 services, plus Chifley House, the Cottage. But we also provide financial support to a range of different groups in the community. The most obvious one being the Historical Society which is an independent group and has its own space next door. I think they pay only a peppercorn rent, like a dollar a year for one of the heritage arms.
So you know where we met in that space in the Conservatorium, well the other one which is the same as that, but that’s where the Historical Society is based. And we’ve built them like a storage facility so that sort of infrastructure is provided by Bathurst Council as well. They’d be the main areas for the Cultural Services, plus there’s also that cultural component if you like, of Kelso Community Centre, but that’s pretty much run and directed by the Community itself there, so again we really are providing the financial support and some infrastructure for them to operate from, and leave them to it.

E: How was your position formed; do you know Council Policy that brought this position into existence?

L: During the amalgamation process they had an Administrator which means that you don’t have a Council per se, or you do have a Council but the administrator is very much able to make fairly lateral decisions, not like a mayor. And it’s always a very interesting environment to work in. And one of the things that were really pushed with the restructure was because Council has over the last couple of years spent a fair bit of money in terms of infrastructure and effort in the cultural scene, they really felt that it was time for there to be a Director who was working with all of those services and programs in the one space. Prior to the position being created, there were 3 Directors and each of them looked after a bit of the cultural team, and sometimes that can be quite a significant disadvantage because you can never get to work as a group. But the big plus for me is that the Directors I’m working with understand what the services are because they’ve all had to look after them at one stage or another, so they have a bit of an idea about what the general picture is.

E: The cultural scene that was already here had been established over a number of years?

L: Last couple of years

E: Was it driven by Council?

L: Oh yes

E: Was it an initiative that came from the community which the Council supported?

L: If you talked to the community, the community will say to you that over the last 10 years or so, Bathurst Council has been pretty shy about being involved with community and cultural services, that they don’t see themselves as a provider of services. That’s a very important point to be aware of with Bathurst Council. Other councils that I’ve worked in are quite comfortable about going for grants and employing staff and actually providing a whole range of services. This Council is very focused on facilitating that sort of development - grant writing, but not actually providing a service if the grant is received. So it’s a very, very different way of working: If you were to talk to the community here what they say is that they’re disappointed that it’s taken so long for there to be an acknowledgement that community and cultural services is important enough to have its own Directorate. However, now the community is in the position of
saying ‘we’re happy that it’s there and what we want to do now is take it to the next level, where ever that might be.’

E: So it’s not a provider of services per se?

L: No

E: But it will actively seek and apply for funding in collaboration with community?

L: Yes

E: Are there identified people who are the key drivers of whatever the community initiatives are?

L: No. There would be key people in the community, but that just depends on whether the issue interests them or not, and wherever they engage Council on it.

E: How do cultural community initiatives actually come to the attention of Council where they will be fostered and promoted?

L: Well, that’s been in turn driven internally through that restructure. So it was about 1 or 2 people and a couple of Councillors and an Administrator who were all in the right space at the right time.

E: So the cultural services are already in place and been established; you were saying you were new in terms being able to direct the position where you want to it go, so apart from the established cultural services what other directions are you interested in going?

L: I’ve got no idea at the moment. The whole idea is that cultural planning process with the community. And so I’m not going to sit here and say, ‘I want it to go this way, or that way’ because there hasn’t been the opportunity yet. I mean I’ve been in the lucky position to come in and say ‘well ok, we’re going to have a cultural planning process.’ We have a Cultural Plan, but I think it’s from the year 2000.

E: 2000 was when it was put together?

L: Yes. Because it’s not a compulsory thing.

E: Do you know what the position of the Department of Local Government is in relation to Social/Community Plans being mandatory?

L: Yes, so they’ve legislated in 1999 to make Local Government actually work with its community to develop a Social Plan which I always think is a really fascinating conversation; that Local Government which says that it’s the tier of government closest to its community, had to be forced to do planning on Community services. I think that says a lot.
E: Are you saying that they need to, or that they were doing it anyway?

L: No, they weren’t doing it, they were just ignoring it, and that’s why the legislation was put in place because it was very much about roads, rates and rubbish. So you’re really only looking at since 1999; I mean some Councils were certainly doing work with their communities beforehand, and historically they were Labor based Councils, particularly pretty much focused around the Metropolitan areas and were quite comfortable about providing a range of community services. Over the last 3 years, once that process was working ok, the cultural community has been looking and saying “well ok, they’re busy doing all this planning amongst the social stuff, let’s get them happening and working in the cultural stuff as well. However the Government hasn’t been brave enough to actually legislate on Cultural Planning. What it’s done is that the State and Federal funding is now being made available for Local Governments who have got a Cultural Plan in place. So what they’re gradually doing is these State Government departments are saying ‘well unless you can show us that you’ve got a bit of a plan in place, we’re not going to fund a project that could be just a one off, so we’ve got to see there’s a vision there’ and that’s how you come back and say ‘well we’ve got to start doing that planning with the community.’

E: Is Council responsible to the Department of Local Government in developing a Cultural Plan?

L: Yes

E: It must have been seen to have been important enough to put one together if there was one here in place in 2000. Why have a Cultural Plan?

L: Beats me, I don’t know. Because everybody that I talk to say they hate it.

E: The one that was put together in 2000?

L: Yes

E: So do you know...

L: I don’t know why, no

E: And the key areas of that Cultural planning in 2000?

L: Just art

E: as in visual?

L: Yes

E: Nothing to do with performing or...?
L: No. No dance, no music, nothing, just art.

E: Do you know if there was a consultation process with the community and if that’s how it came about, or did they just cobble it together?

L: Don’t know

E: That would be interesting. I might get a copy of...

L: there’s no point. It’s a shocking document. Sorry. I’m not comfortable about handing it out because I’ve got such bad feedback from it already.

E: Even from the visual artists?

L: Oh, no they’re comfortable with it. What I’m saying to people is that a Cultural Policy is not an Arts Policy, and it’s really important that it covers the whole sector of cultural industry; that’s it’s not just about the visual arts program.

E: What is your vision of Culture; how do you define ‘culture?’

L: Again that’s something that really has to come from the community and so I’m just guessing at the moment. But car racing is part of Bathurst culture. It’s a really strong component of this place. It drives a whole lot of different events and activities. So it’s not just about the arts, and it’s not just about performance or dance, it’s got a whole lot of different things, and it’s got to be about what the community identifies with.

E: So do you have a brief guiding how to put a Cultural Plan together?

L: Local Government has guidelines and you just have to follow that.

E: But if you don’t do it, it sounds like you won’t get the funding; it’s in all councils interest - all other Councils aside from Bathurst - to actually have a Cultural Plan if they want to go for funding?

L: If a local government sees that it’s important as part of its community fabric, then it would sit down and have a natter to its community and figure out a plan, so that it could go for that funding. But it’s sort of a catch 22, because if they’re not interested in it, they’re not going to do the planning, and they wouldn’t go for the projects either.

E: So the funding would be allocated for certain types of services; they wouldn’t just have funding to say ‘well, we’ll fund car racing.’ I mean would you have to fit certain criteria that the Dept of Local Govt would stipulate as being of cultural interest?

L: Well no, because if you’ve done a plan, which has looked at what the cultural community is interested in - what’s of interest - it’s not about what Government thinks is interesting.
E: So they don’t really have a definite idea?

L: Well they’ll have like a visual arts program and they’ll have a community development program, and they’ll have a museums program; but within that, you’ll write in your application, for a museum or a public program.

E: Would you say that the Dept of Local Government does leave it up to local communities to define for themselves what they mean by their cultural life?

L: Yes

E: There is an interesting debate about what is our culture, what is Australian culture? It sounds like it’s not going to be directed from what you’re saying, from above. They’re not going to say ‘well, we think it’s museums and art galleries and libraries.’

L: I think they do. They do, but this is more about, if they’re saying that they want us to plan with the community, well then that’s the whole idea about Local Government. Its pluses are that it is saying that these are things that are a point of difference in our community, which we are defining as ‘culture’ in our community and therefore that’s what we’re planning around, and that’s what we’ll be looking for in funding projects.

E: So they are leaving a fairly free space?

L: At the moment

E: which may change?

L: Who knows?

E: It depends on how people...?

L: There’s been a significant change with the Ministry of Arts, and you’d be aware that it’s now NSW Arts, and it’s a Department which includes just a whole mish mash of stuff. When the Cabinet was here and we met with the Minister Debus, we were also sitting in with the Environmental person as well as the Attorney General’s Premier’s staff. So you know it’s an enormous portfolio now which has had arts included in with it.

E: They have been lumped in because of the funding strictures, or because they’re being seen as whole of government?

L: Pretty much. This is when Iemma came in, and he did a restructure, and his opinion was that they should all be together. So that’s where they all are.

E: Because you’ve got the Department of Communication, Technology and Arts at the Federal level I think - ‘Arts’ is combined with
L: other stuff

E: yes...with transport and communication. So it would be interesting to understand what the reasoning is, because I think, it sounds like the grants actually drive the procedure, but I don’t know if that’s what you’ve seen?

L: No. I think the worst part about grants is that you very rarely get an untied grant so you’ve got to fit in with different categories.

E: And once you do get that grant, is it annually?

L: No, you’ve got to keep applying on an annual basis for most grants now.

E: So it’s not really a long term vision that they can say ‘well, you’ve got this cultural plan, so now you can plan ahead for 5 or 10 years’?

L: Maximum you can do is 3 years, but even so you still need to apply in those 3 years on an annual basis.

E: Does Social/Community planning tie in with what you do?

L: Well I’m responsible for it, yes.

E: How do they interconnect?

L: Traditionally they don’t interconnect at all. Where I’ve come from, I actually did a Social Plan which included the Environmental plan, the Recreation plan, the Cultural plan and the Social Plan and the Crime Prevention Plan, which is a pretty big document. But it all tied in together. So when we were looking at social issues, we were using that awful sort of thing of saying “well, is there a cultural program that we could use to deal with whatever this issue happened to be; and it might be kids vandalizing something, so you do a cultural program with them around graffiti art or something like that. When we were looking at strategies, we included recreation and culture as key things in dealing with some of the issues that were raised by the community.

E: And that came out of the Social and Community Plan?

L: Yes

E: My understanding is that the community is actually involved in that they are approached and asked?

L: Social Plans are essentially worked up with communities of interest, so they’ll be different agency providers in the city, and other key government organizations as well as community as well as people who just use your community centers for example. So you get a really good cross section of the community; if you’ve got a good enough way of engaging with people to get comment from them.
E: Was that done by publicizing and people coming to the Council chambers?

L: Or of us going out and meeting people; a mix of both.

E: Would that inform possible cultural planning once you have worked out how you’re actually going to get community involved? Is it going to be the same social/community assessment that you’ll be doing?

L: No. It’s not going to be anywhere near as extensive, because you’ve got key groups here that are quite articulate, and that really want to just come forward and say ‘we want you to build this and we want you to do that.’ And there’ll be a bit of that, and there’ll be a bit of meeting with community groups out and about, which is what I’m doing now. So no set plans yet.

E: Until something emerges from talking to different groups?

L: Yes

E: And do you find that there is a good harmonious dynamic in the town; that people generally do agree with where to go?

L: No. Oh they wouldn’t all agree with each other’s areas, no. They’ve all got their own particular area of interest. It was no different from when we were doing the community social planning stuff; in all communities it’s never going to be harmonious because they’re all going to be competing for limited dollars, and limited space and limited attention.

E: And do you see that as an issue?

L: No, I think that’s normal. I don’t have a problem with that at all. I mean I would be really interested to see community which has only got 1 or 2 desires because the interesting thing about the Bathurst community is that we’ve clearly got a significant proportion of retirees or people who have decided to go for the smaller lifestyle options and have left Sydney; so they’re conscious and aware of infrastructure that they would like to have from a cultural perspective. They’re certainly conscious of the types of things that they want happening in their own area of culture whether that be arts, performance or whatever. But they’re also recognizing that we’re in a smaller community and they’re not going to get the whole lot. So I think it’s very healthy for people to sit there and say ‘well we want this, and we want that’ and that there’ll be different things, because for Local Government that is just normal. It would be pretty unusual for everybody to be consistent about one thing.

E: And to somehow pull all the different interests into the one thing?

L: I wouldn’t have any intention of trying to do that because you’re only just setting yourself up not to achieve it.
E: In applying for the funding, would you think it’s going to be something that is about the whole community, or whatever is the loudest interest?

L: No, it’s really about what sort of funding becomes available and who wants what. I mean you never know with Government what’s going to be their flavour of the month, and that gets back to what you were saying about grants driving projects. And that’s where people get quite resentful. Because you end up shaping a program to fit whatever grant monies are available.

E: Is there any option outside of that?

L: As I said it’s very hard to get untied grants. Very difficult. We got one here for $30,000 a couple of years ago and it’s very unusual. Bob Carr had just driven into town. Someone had just been talking to him about an idea, and he said ‘here’s a cheque - $30,000.’ No acquittal process; it was an absolute dream. You don’t get that happening.

E: Well it must have been a worthwhile project?

L: Oh, it still hasn’t finished. There’s been all sorts of stalling in the community because there wasn’t an agreement on what the project was – and that’s the danger of having been able to do a one off like that. Sometimes it’s good to be forced to actually describe and know your project.

E: Yes, which a grant procedure makes you do

L: Yes exactly.

E: You’d have to think it in fine detail

L: Yes, and you have to be clear about people who can actually manage, complete and acquit the project.

E: Are you responsible for that? Or is it something that’s happening on the side?

L: No, it’s something that’s happening on the side and we’ll get that happening through the Arts Council because they’re pretty keen to actually get the project to its final completion point. So that’ll be interesting to see how it goes.

E: How closely does your position work with the Arts Council in Bathurst?

L: I wouldn’t know. Well, I’ve certainly been to meetings so I’ve got a bit of an idea what they’re up to. But they’re an independent body and they like to work independently. They’re a committee and a group that’s been in place for a very long time. And that’s the thing that I like about Bathurst - that you’ve got community groups who are passionate about their area of whatever it is that they like and they’re prepared to spend a bit of time and effort on it. What I don’t want to do through the cultural
planning process is just plonk a local government layer on top and squash it. It really needs to be nurtured so that voluntary capacity stays there and is committed to whatever it is that they’re working on.

E: It sounds like you do see your role as being hands off, in the sense that even though somebody else in this position could have probably taken a different approach...?

L: Well, you’d have to have approval from Council to take that different approach, and they’re not going to approve it.

E: So it’s Council’s ethics?

L: Oh yes, it’s a very strong philosophy

E: that community is the driver?

L: and they’re the doers

E: Have you found that there are key people who tend to be the doers?

L: Oh yes, in every community you’d find that

E: Do you find that there are certain voices that get heard because they tend to know more how to...?

L: Oh yes, they know how to lobby the councilors and they know how to make the noise and who with, and they get what they want.

E: And what about the others that don’t?

L: Well that’s what the cultural planning process is meant to be for; that’s what I see what it is meant to be for because that way then you can actually even that stuff out, so that when you’ve got those noisy squeaky wheels tackling the councilors, you can say ‘now, hang on a minute. There’s this group, this group and this group as well, not just that one.’

E: It sounds as though you see your role as going out and speaking to different people.

L: Well for me local government is about representing all of your groups, not just about representing one or two and that’s really important.

E: which appears to fit nicely in with how Council operates; they’re not just vying for the...

L: Well they try not to. I think they get waylayed by that political process because you have to remember that you can do as much planning as you like in local government, but if a Councillor thinks that red should be pink well then that’s what you get, and you can
bash your head against a wall, there’s no point wasting your time on it. I always say to people ‘As an Officer, I’ll do my best to listen and to put up the correct information’ but the reality is that there’s always that political overlay that I have no control over whatsoever. And that can be the most irritating thing about local government. It can be ok depending on whether it’s going your way or not.

E: In relation to creative industries, do you see a relationship between artifacts people produce and cultural services now is that there’s becoming a very strong, and I think it going to be enhanced by the way that Lemma changed that whole structure for NSW Arts; it seems to be that there’s a very strong desire for government now that if it’s not economically contributing, then it’s not valuable to support. There’s lots of emphasis coming through now; if you’ve got a cultural industry how much is it worth to us, how many dollars is it bringing to your community; how much tourism does it create on an annual basis; so there’s lots of strengthening emphasis now on your statistics, your attendances as in how many dollars is it bringing in to the city; how many beds does it fill, if you have that sort of event that sort of thing attached to it. So for the cultural industry and the economic benefits of it, I think there’s becoming a much stronger need to understand and emphasise it. I think it’s more important to look at what’s happening when you make something, like that process; it could be an actual shocking piece of product, but the person and the process to actually create it is really important. Whereas what we’re doing now, we’re going in to an environment which I think is focused on that final product and the quality of it and how much is it going to bring in for your organization or into your city.

E: If it means that funding is only available for certain things, that it has to be justified in a certain way, do you see that affecting how cultural planning is developed?

L: Well it might, but I have no intention of doing it that way.

E: Do you think that it’s going to mean that you don’t get funding?

L: No, because what you do is build a separate supportive information package, from an economic perspective.

E: Is how you put the application together your responsibility?

L: It may or not be. It might be someone in the community applying for a grant. But if they were to give it to me and ask ‘what do you reckon about it Leslie?’ what I’d be saying is that there’s a gap if you haven’t got economic information there, which will leave you open not getting something.

E: Do you mean in applying for grants other than through local government?

L: Yes
E: Will you be putting the applications together for the local government funding that you are directly responsible for?

L: No it’s the individual Managers in their own special areas.

E: Within Council?

L: Yes

E: So is cultural planning a collaborative process within council?

L: The model that I’m using for the cultural plan is to have the cultural team as the shapers and the guiders of that cultural plan, and then what they’ll do is guide how that actually develops with the community. It will be me pulling it together, but it will be them, like an advisory or planning or steering committee who will be overseeing it. And then what you need to do is have that community consultation

E: Will you be directing the questions?

L: with the team yes

E: What I’m getting at, is there a hierarchy in this team?

L: Yes, there’s me and there’s them

E: At some point you have the final say?

L: Oh yes

E: When it comes to the criteria not being addressed in relation to making a case for industry and the economic impact of the cultural services, is that your decision at the end of the day?

L: Yes

E: Are you saying it’s not just about bringing in dollars?

L: There’s been a change in government thinking; that it’s about looking at what are the dollars that it’s bringing into your city and what its value is.

E: If you see that someone’s doing something that no-one else really thinks is very good and it’s not going to sell or make money...

L: It’s irrelevant to me. As I said, it’s more about the process and what people think. If the community think that’s an important component of its culture, it will be in there

E: It’s because the community identify it and the government might not see those...
L: They won’t look at that part – that’s the thing. It’s unfortunate, but government certainly don’t read these plans to any great extent, and until you actually highlight a paragraph and say ‘that’s supporting the application for the funding that I want from you.’

E: So you would have to fight for what you are applying for? Like you just wouldn’t put the application together and think ‘oh well, whatever happens, happens’

L: You’d have to do that. All you can do is write your application and lobby for it

E: Is lobbying part of the process?

L: Oh yes

E: You don’t let it sell itself. You have to push for it?

L: Yes

E: I’m interested in this because there is no cultural policy in Australia. There’s a lot of talk, soul searching and division within the arts industry about whether there is a necessity for it, and whether we actually do need one as a country. But then we’re being challenged to look at art outside of what it’s been seen to be. It also appears that people are wanting local government perhaps to provide some answers because they’re the grassroots, or seen to be grassroots.

L: We’re only looking to provide answers when it suits government though. I mean what they’ll do is that they’ll just create such a hard thing about it that it won’t get done.

E: Is that the point do you think?

L: Yes. There’s something like 240 local governments in NSW. They’re not going to agree.

E: No, so they’re not going to get an overriding idea

L: No

E: The other question the research is asking is about ‘identity’ and how do we see ourselves. I think there’s about 40 different cultural groups in Bathurst, or linguistically diverse groups that live here. I know that you haven’t been here that long, but how would you see it here?

L: I don’t know, I really couldn’t respond to that. I don’t know that the community has ever got together to think about that collectively and I think there will be the same problem in any community. Different views, they all look at things differently depending on what their needs are.
E: Does the process including consulting with people who may not necessarily speak English very well?

L: Yes. We have a culturally and linguistically diverse group which meets each month. It’s like a reference group which is our point of contact to go out into different networks in the community of that particular ilk. And we have the Aboriginal reference group which again does the same sort of thing. It’s about creating a forum where you can start disseminating information and asking questions and getting people to provide information if they wish. I think this Council has done that quite well in terms of providing some forums; they’re not perfect but you are never going to get perfect forums and you’ll always get individual bias, that’s local government.

E: Do you find that it is accessible and open?

L: It’s there. We’ve got structures, and if people choose to use them, and if we put things out there and they choose to push things; what we’ve tried to do is create some sort of structure that is there; that’s better than not having any at all.

E: Is the new position created for BMEC about community performance?

L: Yes, I’m really not quite sure what the official title is, that’s Margie...

E: Animateur sounds pretty impressive...

L: Yes, absolutely stunning I reckon. That’s a 3 year position. And it’s a really interesting project – very interesting.

E: So my understanding which may not be fully comprehensive, is that this person is there to motivate and to promote performing arts...?

L: Yes, why I’m interested in it is that it’s about the process of growing people and obviously it’s about some outputs, or product at the end of it. It’s a really interesting process because it’s about working with community to get different ideas, and cross hatching happen across different groups which is really good.

E: So the different groups are all performing arts – visual, music...?

L: yes

E: so the brief is across the whole community?

L: I guess you’d say it is, pretty much

E: identify where people want to actually grow certain programs?

L: Yes
E: It sounds like a position the person will be working out as they go along?

L: Oh, most definitely. And Margie’s a very creative lady. So it will be really interesting to see what she comes up with. We met at TAFE last week with the media school. What was really interesting was just watching her and listening to her asking questions; you could just see her mind going a million miles an hour, thinking ‘I could do this, and we could try that.’ She’s done some really interesting things before working here. So she’s got a good broad background of working with different groups of people and generating some interesting performing arts.

E: And people have taken to the idea?

L: I think that those that know about it have certainly been really excited about it. She’s having to get out and about and talk to different groups and just explain the program, and try to prompt enough interest and commitment and enthusiasm to actually put in an application to get the program going, or get a project up and going and she’s doing that.

E: Does she actually have to apply for outside funding?

L: Yes

E: So it’s completely autonomous in terms of just being able to run with whatever comes up?

L: So long as it fits within all of her criteria. I haven’t read the Service Agreement that well, so I wouldn’t know specifics.

E: Is it a collaboration between Bathurst Regional Council and other responsible bodies for the position?

L: Yes, it’s NSW Arts which used to be the Ministry; and it’s the Australia Arts Council

E: And is there a steering committee?

L: Yes

E: Your interest is to see how it goes, rather than being directly involved in what’s happening?

L: Yes, because that’s going to be a program that’s going through BMEC. It’s got nothing to do with me per se, physically – so Stephen (Champion) manages that. That’s really very much about how the performing arts wants to work with that project.

E: Is Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre run independently – or does it have connections with Bathurst Regional Council?
L: It’s run by Council. Stephen is an employee of Council and if he makes a loss Council covers it, so Council runs the program.

E: So Margie’s position is accountable to Stephen?

L: Yes

E: and there’s a steering committee made up of those three bodies?

L: Yes

E: Yes that’s going to be really interesting in that a completely new type...

L: Very new idea, a new way of working

E: Are other councils doing something similar?

L: Well, there are trials – I haven’t had anything to do with the development of it – it was all done, signed and sealed before I arrived. I think that there are 3 projects around the state.

E: and they’re called animateurs?

L: oh I don’t know that they’re all calling it that – it’s our particular...

E: to promote and motivate and support cultural activity at grassroots?

L: Yes

E: and they’re run through councils?

L: Yes

E: So it’s not other bodies doing it?

L: It’s grown out of the issue like most things do, that entertainment centres have gone a little bit away from the path of developing and growing local talent. What they’ve become are venues, rather than places of learning and development. And so this is how we can actually get the two things happening in an entertainment centre. We’ll buy end product and we’ll have a subscription season, and we’ll have different things happening here. You will have your local performing society who work there as well. But it’s also how you nurture and develop what’s in your own city.

E: Which is the local talent?

L: Yes
E: or making services accessible so that people can develop skills?

L: Both. Well that’s my understanding of it.

E: Because I think there is community cultural development and how that seems to have just been...

L: shoved

E: yes.

L: I think that might have been from the Australia Council...that’s where we lost the cultural development stuff.

E: So council could apply to CCD for funding, whereas now they’ve got to go through audience development and marketing?

L: Yes

E: It sounds like this position is almost counteracting against that move?

L: Yes

E: Like a deliberate countermove?

L: No, I think it’s just them feeling guilty

E: So they’ve made 3 positions available across the State?

L: Yes

E: Whereas before there was a whole plethora of...

L: You have to remember it’s a joint thing between NSW Arts as well as the Australia Council. The Australia Council is getting a fair bit of flack. But I mean it was such a blatant thing to do with no consultation with the community and so I think that NSW Arts being a partner in the program with on the ground input probably are the key component. I wouldn’t know because I wasn’t in all of the discussions. You’d have to ask Stephen (Champion at BEMEC).

E: This position seems to be trying to fill in that gap. Do you know what was being done before this position?

L: There was nothing there

E: because there was a person here but they were more filling in until...
L: in terms of my role?

E: yes because I would imagine that your role is to consult with people and ask ‘what do you want, what does the community want?’

L: And that’s really where the cultural planning process comes into its own I suppose.

E: Is the difference of the Department of Local Government with the Local Government and Shires Association that the Department of Local Government is a statutory peak body?

L: Yes. Well it’s a government department – State Government department with a Minister. LGSA is really just a peak lobbying body

E: Have they got a cultural...?

L: They are the group that pushed the cultural planning guidelines

E: to the Department of Local Government?

L: Yes

E: are they lobbying on behalf of council?

L: No. What they did was they gave LGSA funding for 2 or 3 years, something like that, and they had a Cultural Officer who worked in Local Government and Shires Association and the intent of that position was to work with Local Governments to get them to plan for cultural services in their local government. Again it’s almost a State cost shift. So you had State Governments saying to Local Government Shires ‘here’s some money. We want to give you an Officer who will go out and help Local Government take on the role of Cultural Planning.’ So that’s what they did.

E: And the person has left?

L: It was a terribly tough position to be in – that was Michelle. You don’t go into LGSA unless you prepared to work with an enormous lot of political comings and goings.

E: How many women are there (at LGSA)?

L: I don’t think that there’s that many.

E: But there is a cultural department within LGSA

L: well that’s like 2 people, or something like that

E: and one’s no longer there.
L: Yes

E: From your perspective how do they see their role?

L: Well the role of the LGSA is meant to be a peak body who speaks on behalf of councils across NSW, as I said there’s a lot of them; we all have different wants and likes and needs; different communities. And so there’s always been the concern that it’s been difficult for any one individual council to lobby government and get what they want. So the classic thing is create a body who will lobby on your behalf. But that then assumes that they’re going to know all about what it is that you want, and I’m not sure that always happens.

E: Would they actually consult and ring and say ‘what’s happening?’ in terms of getting their finger on the pulse to work out how...?

L: Every now and then you get a desperate note from Noel to say, ‘tell me what’s happening?’ But if you’re like me, you’ll ring Noel and say ‘Noel, I’m really not happy about this or that, or the other.’ Or ‘this is happening. Tell me what else is happening in other local government areas. What are other people doing?’ And so, again it’s very individual. Some people will just ignore LGSA totally because they think they don’t achieve anything; a purely political creature which gets stuck in the mire of politics. It took them a long time for those cultural planning guidelines to actually be developed and the way that they were developed was through NSW Ministry employing someone, and they wrote the guidelines and then LGSA got hold of them and said ‘We don’t like it.’ Rewrote them until there was a final agreed document. We have a cultural accord between the Department of Local Government and the LGSA, and the cultural accord is a 3 year thing which is how that Officer was funded.

E: Michelle who left?

L: Yes

E: Is that position going to be re-advertised?

L: I don’t know. It would be interesting to ask Noel about it.

E: It sounds like it’s important the person in that position is on side.

L: Oh yes

E: if they are instrumental to these guidelines

L: Yes

E: Noel would have actually reviewed the guidelines and rewrote them?
L: No, Michelle did. That’s the hierarchy in LGSA – Noel is like the Policy Director for want of a better description; I don’t know what his correct title is. And then under that you have a range of different areas; so Michelle was the Cultural portfolio.

E: Michelle put the guidelines together. And again, there was an accord with the Dept of Local Government...

L: I don’t know that Michelle actually put them together – she was given the ones from Department of Local Government and didn’t like them. And then there was lobbying between the Dept of Local Government and LGSA.

E: Was Michelle supported by people in LGSA?

L: It was a tough job. She’s a tough lady. But the reality for me was that she was a person in a key position who could tell you what the winds of change were in the Department of Local Government and could also give you a good reflection on what was happening across the State. And that’s where Noel is handy because he does that. For example, this is a different area, but crime prevention; when we were setting up crime prevention planning and also the other area was the CDSE grants – Community Development Support Expenditure which are the funds you get through the poker machines - so we set up committees for that. And they were involved as the representative of the Local Governments when they were talking to the Department of Gaming and Racing for example. So they would go away and make some decisions on our behalf, and come back and say ‘well this is what we’ve agreed to; let us know what you think.’ And of course there would be things you’d like and things that you didn’t like: That’s just the way that LGSA works. Again, it’s a very political process...Explore the cultural accord, because the interesting thing with the cultural accord is that it’s changed a little bit for this 3 year triennium. What they’re doing is focusing on what they’re calling convergence where cultural groups work together more closely. And so they’re really interested in libraries and museums and galleries and archives working together a lot more, and they should do. It’s a definite change in the way that they’re viewing the cultural scene – instead of saying that there’s 4 areas and they’re going to fund them, we’re going to be looking with a great deal of interest if we happen to get a grant application that looks at those things working together for example.

E: Would that be one of the things that you would be looking at here?

L: Oh yes.

E: Is it like people working together in the traditional cultural groups as in the art galleries, museums...?

L: Yes. But I mean they haven’t had any opportunity to actually work together because they’re just so busy in their own spaces. They’re not resourced all that well. I think for a lot of services they push themselves to the limit to create some really good events or product, whatever the product happens to be, and they haven’t got the time to actually do that joint planning. For me that’s where my role is really important.
E: It appears from talking to people in these type of roles, that it is about facilitating. One person said ‘joining the dots’ because these people do work independently of each other, even though they’ve got common interests in the way as you say convergence seems to be the thing people are encouraged to do, if they’re going to apply for funding. I guess it is what you would expect people to do naturally, pick up the phone and say ‘well there’s this happening’ which doesn’t appear to happen.

L: I think it’s partly resource driven. People just feel like that they’ve got to focus on getting their own interests out the door, on the wall, or on the stage, and they just put all of their effort there, and all of a sudden they lift up their head and think ‘I wonder what’s happening over there?’ And it’s really very interesting to observe from my perspective.

E: If you are bringing people together by what you’re doing, is that going to be an outcome?

L: I’m hopeful for that. For me that’s what I really want to achieve with the cultural plan. We’re actually starting off as the cultural team just talking about our 10 year plans because each of them have a vision for their own facility which isn’t about the Bathurst cultural scene, which is what I’m much more interested in.

E: But you’re hoping that through the consultation process, something will emerge that will say this is the Bathurst cultural scene. It’s not going to be you or the team, necessarily

L: No

E: but it will be coming out of that process?

L: You get a feel when you sort of start wondering around for a while, like what the community thinks it’s point of difference it – what’s special about it. What it wants to actually enhance. What it’s happy to sit perhaps a bit lower on the scale of priorities. But that takes time. I was being interviewed at 2BS the other day and was told ‘oh, you’ve been taking the pulse of the city.’ It’s too early; towns have subtleties and nuances that take time to come out and I’m not going to write a 5 year plan just from talking to a few people. And that’s where I’ll be relying very heavily on our cultural team because they’ve been here for a while; they do know the sector, they know as you say, those key players, the key drivers; they know who we need to get to pull in. But for me I want them understanding their own particular areas first, before we start adding the extra layers of what’s happening in the community.

E: Do you have an idea of the cultural landscape, just from what you’ve seen, something of the character of the town emerging: getting a sense of the town?

L: No, lots of stuff. Yes. I mean there’s lots of areas; lots of different things. And you’ve got to marry that with Council’s expectations too. Council has certainly sought to strengthen the Museums sector over the last couple of years. And they’ve done
everything out of kilter with the report that they’ve written, and so now what they’re looking to say is ‘well ok, we’ve spent a lot of money. What we want to do is seeing it all meshing together neatly and nicely so that we’ve got some complimentary things going on in the City, so we don’t have overlaps, so that we don’t have wasted things.’ It’s commonsense stuff really.

E: Is that Council’s perspective?

L: Yes

E: So with the vision that you have – I think we’ve touched on that – about convergence, that people who ordinarily work in their own sector, actually work as a group

L: or acknowledge that there are other things and other groups they can be working with. So that they’re not just putting their head up and their bum down and burrowing away.

E: That would be a personal vision of how you would see where you would like this to go?

L: I don’t know how I want it to go. Because it’s not about me; it’s about how the community actually sees it should be.

E: So if you find that they don’t really want to work together, and they’re quite happy doing their own thing, then that’s ok?

L: Well it won’t be ok from Council’s perspective, because they won’t provide any funding.

E: So is there an overriding understanding of a direction?

L: Yes

E: But it’s from Council how it works because it’s got a philosophy of consulting with community, and it is about the community. It’s not just about certain little groups that work independently of each other...?

L: But it’s also got the philosophy of ‘we’re not going to be the provider.’ There’s a really strong underpinning statement – that we want to keep all of those providers in the city; they have to be there, but we don’t want them all competing for the same dollar and walking all over each other. We want to see them working together.

E: Is there a charter of ethics, Council’s ethos?

L: Well Council has a Management Plan which has it’s vision. Council has it’s own vision, but it doesn’t actually say it’s not going to be a provider. That’s just the history of the City for the last 10 or 15 years.
E: Is that because you know that, or been given the Charter?

L: I’ve been told it in no uncertain terms ‘These are your parameters, Lesley.’ I don’t have a problem with that.

E: What are the obstacles if you did have a personal vision?

L: The obstacles are just going to be the community’s wants. It’s very clear that they want to have a community arts space, and that’s been there for a while.

E: At BMEC?

L: No. From what people have said and talked about and written, it will be a physical structure which has space for whether you want to do needle work, or whether you want to do some dance, or whether you want to do some clay work or whatever. It will be a space for the community to go for a whole range of different arts.

E: Did that come out of the Social/Community Plan?

L: Oh no, this has been something that the community has been talking about for ages.

E: It’s not happened?

L: No, it’s a lot of dollars to create a physical structure like that.

E: Is Council behind it?

L: They’re happy to acknowledge that the community would like that, but they’re also saying ‘well, where are you going to get the dollars from?’

E: If it won’t be funded by Council will outside funding need to accessed?

L: Yes

E: And do you think there’s enough interest in the community to drive the project?

L: It seems to have waxed and waned a little. It’s obviously been in books for the last 5 years and groups have thought it was ok and worked with it, then it’s gone away and it’s come back dusted off and ‘here we go, this is what we want.’

E: Do you see it happening?

L: I don’t see why it can’t.

E: It appears to be a community need with the number of people talking about it?
L: Yes, exactly. And I think for this sort of community it would be perfect because there’s such a variety of different things that groups are interested in doing. And I think if there was a really good space for that to happen, it would be excellent. Again it fits with me in terms of looking at ‘let people have a go at it.’ It’s about that process, it’s not about what the final product is; if it’s terrific it’s great, if it makes money – great, all well and good. But in that process of creating that product, there’s some really good things that create strong community fabric if you like, all along the way. And I think that’s really important.

E: It seems to reflect on the community cultural development ideas about social capital and belonging, building community...

L: and feeling safe enough to go and expose yourself to do something that might be perhaps a tad not so good. You might not have the art work that’s as good to hang at the Art Gallery, but you’re comfortable about hanging it in a community space. I think that’s good.

E: Yes it sounds like a good idea, depending on whether it’s going to happen or not

L: exactly.

E: Thankyou very much for your time today Lesley.

L: You’re welcome.
E: The first question after having read your literature and things that you’ve written, I’m trying to work how you describe what you do. What’s your role, do you have a title for what you do?

D: What I do now?

E: Yes now, I suppose would be a good place to start

D: Ah, well what I do now is I’m a freelance consultant. People hire me to do three basic kinds of things. They hire me to provide them with policy advice, and I work in 2 areas; cultural policy and crime prevention policy. My work on cultural policy is with the government Commonwealth, State and the Local Government sectors. Local Government also hire me to help them develop cultural plans. The way I work with Local Government is I don’t do the plan for them. I do it with them. So I try to use community cultural development principles in the way that I work. I try to give people an insight into their own understanding of culture and what it means to them and what it might mean to the people in the particular community that we’re working with. And then I develop their confidence and their competence in understanding what the cultural implications of their actions in local government might be. I try to argue that everything that local government does has a cultural impact of one kind or another, whether that’s recognized or not. I try and get them to understand that approving a shopping mall with no active street frontage is going to have cultural implications. It will destroy the small businesses; it will lead to the decline of strip shopping.

I also do organizational development work which involves helping organizations develop their strategic plans. I also do leadership development work, where I basically help middle and senior management develop their leadership skills and develop insights into their own behaviour and the impact that their behaviour has on other people, how to deal with conflict successfully, how to be assertive how to develop effective teams; how to delegate effectively; how manage results - those kinds of things.

And then the third kind of thing I do, people ask me sometimes to facilitate meetings, so I do quite a lot of that work as well.

E: Ok. I’ll just take it from the local government perspective – who takes the initiative to actually employ you?

D: The Local Council.
E: So it would be an initiative that would need to be come to an agreement as a Council that they actually do need Cultural Development. Is that how it normally works?

D: Well it varies: Arts NSW has developed a set of guidelines for cultural planning, which in fact I wrote.

E: I was wondering who wrote that? I was told it was consultants...

D: That was me

E: So a group of consultants or just one person?

D: No just me. And even though another consultant is credited in the document, in fact the bulk of the material, I’d say 99% of the material is what I wrote, although it was a collaborative effort as I developed a reference group of people in the sector whose contribution was quite considerable because I wanted to make sure that it was real and that it met their needs. So although it’s not a requirement that Local Governments develop a cultural plan, it’s not mandated as such, very many local councils in NSW have done that. What often happens is that the initiative will come from an Officer level. Occasionally it will come from the elected representatives. So for instance, in the work I did with Parramatta Council recently, the initiative there was from elected representatives who had been unable to reach a decision about where to put an Art Gallery. And their Lord Mayor a planner by profession argued I think quite properly, that he didn’t want to decide on a site for an Art Gallery, or even decide whether or not to have an Art gallery until he had some sort of strategic plan for cultural development for that municipality. And I think that was a really unusual situation. You don’t often get an elected representative with that degree of vision or understanding. So the method I used there was a sherrette; a series of workshops that took place over several weeks where I pulled together people who knew a lot about planning for cultural facilities. I got Pauline Peel down from Brisbane; she’d been the architect of the Powerhouse Performing Arts Centre in Brisbane. She and the then Lord Mayor Jim Sorley had worked closely together on that. I got Susan Conroy who was the energy and ideas behind the development of the Casula Powerhouse and she’d worked quite closely with Mark Latham who was then the Mayor of Liverpool at the time to get that whole project up and running. I got Ross Gibson to come in; he’s the Professor of New Media at UTS because the staff at Parramatta were very interested in developing a niche in new media work because they saw new media as being an effective bridge between so called ‘high’ or elite art, and the vernacular culture that had developed in Parramatta. And there are a lot of people in particular who have taken up the new media forms of expression with great enthusiasm, and also that Council had been supporting a little new media incubator known as ‘Switch’ in Parramatta for some time. So we got Ross involved in the team. And we also got a lovely man called John Montgomery who is originally a Scotsman and has worked a lot in Ireland in Dublin in particular, and also in large towns in Great Britain and has been living and working in Australia for the last few years. He’s an interesting man because he’s a land use planner and an economist. So we got all those fantastic brains together in one room with a group of the elected representatives including the Lord Mayor and four or five other Councillors and key staff from within...
the organization. And we worked through a whole lot of issues about what the strategic priorities—for cultural development in Parramatta should be and what role culture would play in the development of that city, particularly given it’s been designated as one of the 7 Regional capitals for Sydney as part of Metro Plan. It was a very interesting process. I’ve written an article for the Museums and Galleries NSW; it’s in their latest newsletter. I think the interesting thing about that process was that it really brought the elected representatives and the staff together on the journey. Too often I think when Councils enter into some sort of strategic planning process whether it’s for culture or anything else, it’s for the initiatives to come from the Officers and the elected representatives are not brought in until fairly late down the track. The upshot of that whole process was that we got a much better location for the Art Gallery than we would have got any other way because the Councilors could see the strategic significance of the art Gallery, and also understood that it wasn’t just about building buildings, it was about nurturing the creative abilities of artists—and of the wider community. The strategies that they’ve come up with are not just the usual response which is build a building, whack a plaque on it, there you go. They’ve said yes ‘we do want an art gallery because we are the second city of Sydney and we deserve an art gallery. And we want to nurture our local creative people so that we don’t get the brain drain out of Parramatta to Newtown and Marrickville’ which is where they’ve been going. We want to keep them in the City, so they’ve developed subsidized Artists Studios out there which were opened last weekend. And they’re also looking at a number of programs to encourage the creativity of local residents themselves.

E: So was there any community involvement? Were there actual community people that were part of that process?

D: No, but there had been a whole lot of consultation and involvement leading up to it. Parramatta has an interesting approach to community consultation. They had an extensive community consultation process in the development of Parramatta 2025 their future vision for the City.

E: Is that like a Social/Community Plan is it part of cultural planning?

D: It’s much bigger than just a Community Plan. It looks at economic, social, environmental and now cultural development for the city.

E: So that’s not mandated. That’s something that they’ve taken the initiative...?

D: They’ve taken that on themselves. Yeah, it’s a long range planning and I can’t quote you actual numbers that have been involved. It’s been hundreds and hundreds. And they’ve targeted particular communities to make sure they don’t miss out; young people, communities of non-English speaking background, mums with young kids. The other thing they’ve got, and again I’m not absolutely 100% on top of the detail, but they have set up what they call a Jury System, where they’ve selected a cross section of their community who function like a big focus group. And so they will often refer matters to that group, they’ll test policies and ideas with that group. They’ll ask for feedback from things like Australia Day.
E: Who makes up the Jury?

D: Just ordinary citizens. They’re selected. So it’s not just the squeaky wheel that’s getting the attention which so often happens in Local Government.

E: What about Local Government in this area, because you’d be familiar with their workings and whether they are actually representing the local community?

D: Leichhardt Council itself? I think the elected representatives do to a large extent. Yeah...

E: Have they implemented a Cultural Plan?

D: Not as far as I’m aware. I think they did do some work a few years ago, but nothing that I...I mean it may very well be happening, it’s just that I’m not aware of it.

E: But do you think that it’s needed? Is it something that should really happen as matter of course because it’s Local Government?

D: Well I think that. But I’m biased. I mean I’m obsessed with ‘culture’ and Cultural Development and Cultural Policy; that’s my thing you know. And I think that it’s part of being human. But that’s not a view that’s a majority view or a popular view. And Australia I think, has a long way to go before it develops the confidence of European countries where ‘culture’ is just seen as a right, not a privilege. It’s seen as critical, critical not just to nation building but to civilized life.

E: So should cultural planning be a mandatory function of Local Government? I know it’s not and it is up to the initiative as you say, of administrators and sometimes elected representatives.

D: Look I think with Agenda 21, we’ve seen in the environmental sector, some big changes occurring in peoples’ consciousness. Now we’re still got a long, long way to go, but it’s not all that long ago that Agenda 21 was introduced to Local Government.

E: Sorry, could you just explain what that is?

D: Agenda 21 arose out of the world summits on the environment that happened and basically says this is what Local Government needs to do to ensure ecologically sustainable development. There’s a whole range of factors that have been identified as something that local government can influence and manage.

E: World summit – where’s that?

D: Rio

E: And that’s a fairly new...?
D: Oh no this was...when was Rio, you’re testing my memory now. Oh, it was a long time ago, in the ‘80’s or ‘90’s?

E: Ok so people have come back from that and having....

D: It’s a global push. And in addition there have been a number of other Summits that have been held subsequent to that which have looked at the interdependence or interrelationship between economic, environmental and social development.

E: So it would be the Jon Hawkes’ sustainability model of the four pillars that would explain this interdependence?

D: I think that the recognition of the interdependence of these forces began because the so-called Third Worlds or developing nations said ‘excuse me. It’s all very well, for you guys to say China shouldn’t have refrigerators and China shouldn’t have cars. Well what’s the West doing about keeping its own house in order, you can’t say the Third World countries should just live in rural, agrarian, feudal poverty. These countries argued for the connection between economic development, social equity and ecological sustainability—and for it not to be seen as an either or. And now, Hawkes argues I think very plausibly that the so-called triple bottom lined is not to be equated with the commitment to balancing social, environmental and economic development. He argues that the triple bottom line reduces everything to financial or economic impacts and imperatives, and that as such is not an appropriate tool. And I happen to agree with that argument. But I think what his book ‘The Fourth Pillar’ does is argue quite plausibly for recognition that culture is not a sub-set of social. You’ll find in some local Councils that’s how they see it. They feel that they have to do a Social Plan because that is mandated and if they just whack a bit of culture in there that’ll be fine. I don’t agree with that. I think that if anything culture transcends social. But I don’t argue that very strongly. I just say ‘look it needs to sit alongside.’

E: Well I think it would be up to Councils to actually recognize that there is a need to strategically plan for cultural development so I suppose that’s what it comes down to. They actually employ...

D: I think with Agenda 21 it’s now regarded as absolutely normal that Councils should report on their measures to minimize the negative environmental impacts and to maximize ecological sustainability. So it’s regarded as just business as usual. And I feel that until ‘culture’ is mandated, culture will not have its proper status or recognition. I think the other thing that happens at all levels of politics, not just in local government, is that as the new leaders come in with different priorities and different perceptions. The Local Government and Shires Association developed a paper on the economic situation of local government in NSW. The paper drew a distinction between maximalist and minimalist Councils. Minimalist Councils were Roads, Rates and Rubbish; maximalist Councils were concerned with other issues like Social, Cultural and Environmental. And I think that these distinctions have been interpreted by conservative elements within government as meaning that roads, rates and rubbish is critical and everything else is
kind of optional. Which I think is a very retrograde step. I think the other issue there is that, with rate pegging local councils have been unable to keep pace with the growing costs of service delivery. And those costs have grown partly in a response to cost shifting by Federal and State government who required local government to do more and more and haven’t given them the money to do it. And also because of the infrastructure that local government has to maintain. It wasn’t until the new Local Government Act was brought in on the early 1990’s in NSW that Local Government was required to develop an Asset Management Plan including everything from buildings and sea walls to park benches and trees and community centers and libraries. This process has highlighted how difficult it is for many councils to find the money to maintain their asset base.

E: Are we going through tough times? I thought we were going through a prosperous boom.

D: Well I think if you ask local government, they will tell you that they can’t raise the revenue they need to keep pace with the costs.

E: So do you see that there is the promotion of local council to actually work together in partnerships and alliances so that they actively get together, pool their resources, attract funding from the three tiers and they’re able to do the things that they couldn’t do if they were not able to raise rates. That it’s really been driven now by the idea of coalitions and alliances. I mean do you see that happening at all?

D: Certainly I think that there is another model for Local Government which is not about local government having to be the service provider for everything but local government having a critical role to play as the place manager if that makes sense? So local government doesn’t have to provide all the child care and all the aged care and all the disability services, and all the cultural stuff and all the sporting stuff. Rather that local government does have a role to play in bringing the providers in both government and non-government sectors to the table and establishing who can contribute what to meet identified needs in the community. Now that role for Local Government is not a new idea; it began back in the 1980’s with what was called Integrated Local Area Planning or ILAP which was being promoted really strongly by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). And the ALGA was arguing very strongly that they needed to be an equal partner at the table with federal and state government and not treated as the poor cousin because they had a role in the planning for that place, and for coordinating the inputs of the government, non-government and commercial sectors into that community.

E: They’re LGSA (the LGSA is the state based body. The ALGA is the national body – both still exist) now I think. Do you think that that’s what they’re doing now or...?

D: I think a number of councils do do that very well. And like everything it depends on the leadership and a lot of the senior managers in local government in this state come from technical, i.e. engineering or accounting backgrounds rather than social, cultural or management.
E: Are you aware how many local councils actually do employ Cultural Development staff?

D: No, I don’t know that.

E: I mean I actually asked this of Arts NSW and they weren’t aware of it either. I mean because it’s not a statutory requirement I would imagine that it is only the Councils that are visionary...I know that Bathurst has got one, but they seem to have a fairly progressive way of planning and strategic development. I think that where councils don’t see it as an issue they won’t employ those staff, so from what I can gather, the people I’m talking to, exactly what you’re saying, people with an arts or cultural perspective they don’t seem to be getting into these administratively...?

D: Well, there would be 2 exceptions to that that I’m aware of. There is the new appointed General Manager for the City of Sydney who has a background in cultural development. Very unusual appointment, particularly for the City of Sydney which is you know, very big the General Manager of Brisbane City Council has a social science background I think. Anne Dunne was the General Manager at the City of Philip formerly known as St Kilda and she has a cultural and community development background. The General Manager of Maitland, later the General Manager of one of the Council’s here in Sydney has a background as a librarian.

E: So is she still there?

D: No. And they’re very much exceptions. Usually Cultural Workers in Local government are so far down in the food chain that their capacity to influence policy and behaviour, is somewhat constrained.

E: Well the other thing I’m seeing to be striking, is that people are saying within Local Government, it isn’t up to (I’m talking about the regions, I don’t know the Metropolitan area very well) but they’re saying it’s really not something that local government should really take the initiative. It should be driven by the community, so if the community aren’t coming up with programs and ideas and saying ‘well, we want this’ whatever they deem to be cultural, then there is no need because the community aren’t saying that they want it. So it’s kind of a circular argument. But it’s really powerful, because I’m finding it at the higher levels too, that they’re saying ‘well, the community isn’t coming up with the ideas, so why bother?’

D: Well, I think that’s interesting. I think I find that difficult to believe on one level. I suppose it depends on who’s running the town. And traditionally, the Arts were seen as the prerogative of an elite. And it was very much for the nice middle class ladies to them something to do. So they ran the Arts Councils and they were kind of the Queen Bees of culture in their community. But that’s changed a lot. I mean certainly, Regional Arts NSW has undergone a huge transformation since the 1980’s where the whole thrust of their initiative is to involve members of local communities in the development of their own cultural resources and cultural expression and to see that recognized at all levels of
local govt. You asked me before about Councils cooperating – I think that the Regional Arts Development model in NSW has been very successful in promoting a Regional approach getting an economy of scale operating that perhaps wouldn’t be possible for Councils that are quite small, have a small rate base and small numbers of staff. So I think they’ve been very successful in creating awareness of what’s possible. I think that the other thing to is that people don’t go around talking about ‘the Arts.’

E: No, and I think this is what you’re saying; it’s like a shift in vision.

D: If you ask people ‘what do you think about the Arts?’ People will say ‘what do you mean?’ or ‘that’s not for me, that’s for rich people.’

E: It’s the opera, gallery, theatre

D: Yeah. If you say to them, ‘What do you do? Tell me about what you do?’ They’ll go ‘Oh well, you know I, look it’s just a little thing I do in the shed. You know, I make furniture. Or I make, I knit baby clothes or I do quilting, or I embroider, I’m in a Choir, or in a local dramatic society.’ They’ll say ‘Oh yea, I do drama, or I sing but it’s not The Arts.’ I think the terminology is against us, as well as the fact that in Australia as a colony, the arts were seen as a way of establishing and maintaining class distinction. And so, the arts were consciously and deliberately manufactured as an elite activity. If you look at the influences of utilitarianism in the 19th century, the arts were seen as a civilizing influence. So if you got the great unwashed, and you exposed them to the Arts, they would somehow become better people. If you read-about the development of Museums they were seen as educational, an altogether-worthier alternative to circuses and side-show alleys and vaudeville which were seen as very tacky and grubby and lower class. I think there’s always been a hierarchy of privileging certain forms of cultural production over others. That’s been with us since white settlement really, and people’s expectations and values and attitudes to the Arts have been very strongly influenced by this hierarchy.

E: Yes, well the other interesting factor of the Regional Arts Boards is that there are 13 around NSW, but there’s isn’t a Regional Arts Board that has been as a result of Local Councils in Metropolitan Sydney. And what I’m getting from that is ‘well, they don’t want - the communities aren’t actually driving the need to have a RADO that would be cultural development person for the Metropolitan areas, because these suburbs tend to be very well serviced, they don’t have any needs to actually see community arts filter up from community and drive these initiatives. And I’m finding that’s a really interesting argument. So why is that the other areas recognising that the community, if that’s what’s happening, is the community saying ‘well we want to have these community cultural development projects and programs happening?’ So why is it happening everywhere except within the suburbs that are supposed to be wealthier, that they don’t need to do anything locally. And this is the example that was given, that the Eastern suburbs can quite easily drive into town and they’ve got the Opera House...?
D: Yeah, but I think that you’ve only got to look at the rise of choirs in the last 10 years right throughout Australia in rural and Metropolitan areas because people want to express their creativity through music.

E: So it’s happening in those suburbs?

D: It’s happening here! I’m a member of a choir that rehearses in a church up the road. It’s not a church choir, it’s a secular choir. And there are 50 members. I’d say very few of us have a classical or formal musical education. A lot of us can’t read music. What motivates us is that we want to sing and we get an enormous amount of pleasure singing together.

E: Who instigated that idea?

D: Well, in this instance it was the local Community College that offered a class and a number of us got together and formed the choir, and they provided us with the Choir Master who’s brilliant. And we’re now in our 4th year and we’re getting more confident and we’re performing in public.

E: What’s it called?

D: It’s called Viva Voce. I think that’s just one example of what people are doing. If you look at the involvement of young people in New Media and in Zines and in Blogging and with the technology now they’re able to make videos and film. Culture is so much more affordable and accessible than it was in the past.

E: I suppose what I am looking at Community Cultural Development. I do understand there have been some major shifts occurring and it’s going to be changing from CCD and I don’t know what the language is going to be which describes what it’s going to be. So what’s you’re take on what’ happening in that sector?

D: Well I think...have you read ‘From Nimbin to Mardi Gras’?

E: Yes, Hawkins...

D: Yeah, well her argument there which I happen to agree with is that Community Arts and later Community Cultural Development were bureaucratic inventions. And the same could be said for the Regional Arts Development Officer program – it was a bureaucratic invention. And so the people didn’t rise up spontaneously in the regions and say ‘give us Regional Arts Development Officers.’ I mean that just didn’t happen.

E: It was driven by funding, really. I mean the money was made available and somebody believed in. Someone like Nugget Coombs or Donald Horne...

D: Yeah, I mean partly that. And partly that the Community Arts Board as it began, was motivated by a commitment to give people the access to resources to express their own creativity. And in the beginning, in the early days in the 1970’s when the Board was a
Committee of Council, 1975 was it created...it dealt with a whole range of stuff. It dealt with Community Art Centers; Festivals; it co-funded the establishment of the Community Theatre Program with Theatre Board, that led to the establishment of groups like Flying Fruit Fly Circus and West Community Theatre and the Murray River Performing Group and so on, that have now of course, evolved into groups like Urban Theatre Projects and so on. I think that what I’m trying to say, it had a very broad policy approach. It was very flexible and very responsive. When McKinsey’s Management Consultants were brought in by the Australia Council to review the Australia Council structure they recommended the abolition of the Community Arts Committee and the devolution of funds to local government. They argued that Community Arts was not a Federal Government responsibility; it was a Local Government responsibility. That move was effectively resisted due to the leadership of Andrea Hull who was then the Senior Project Officer with the Board and a very well orchestrated and coordinated protest movement from throughout Australia. The Minister was so impressed that upgraded the committee to a Board in 1978. And over the years they’ve been successive attempts largely motivated or driven within the organization to knock the Board off. And those you can read about in Donald Horne’s book Into the Open where he describes the attempts by Barry Cohen, who was then Minister for the Arts under a Federal Labor Government led by Bob Hawke to abolish the Board because he thought that they were too political Donald Horne who was then the Chair managed to with a very skillful bit of maneuvering establish the Community Cultural Development Committee which was established in 1987. And then it became a Board again, in the early ’90’s. What we’ve seen most recently with the Australia Council is an attempt to completely knock off that entity. Last Christmas I interviewed some150 people in community cultural development, and researched various policy issues and concerns. The results are published on the Australia Council website and I think that gives a pretty good snapshot of what was going on as recently as last Christmas in the sector. Community arts and community cultural development has always been a highly contested sector - there is no pat definition. - there is no one definition of what’s acceptable practice.

E: Is it because it’s on the fringes and its radical and it does tend to challenge the status quo. I mean I’m trying to work out what it is about artworkers that, you know the professional artworkers who are working in community who empower in whatever way, giving them a voice through the arts. What is it that’s so challenging and frightening, because that’s what I’m coming to with what’s happening with the sector? I mean it’s not controllable, or something and this is what I’m trying to work out.

D: Well I have my own views about that, but they’re very much my own views.

E: That’s what I’m interested in because you’re in a better place than most to say what you think

D: I don’t know that people would agree with me. I think when you work in an alternative way, alternative to the mainstream, then you’re probably doing that because you’re questioning things. And therefore, you know that old story, you get 5 members of the Labor Party in 1 room and automatically you’ve got 57 factions. Well it’s a bit like that in CCD. The kinds of people that are attracted to that kind of practice are by their
nature questioning kinds of people. Some of them are subversive, many of them are quite conservative middle class people, but who prefer to work in this particular kind of way. Some of them are driven by very deep political and philosophical commitments. It’s a very eclectic field. And it always has been, and I suspect it always will be. And I think what happened in the ‘90’s and the 2000’s, was that the official policy became quite narrow, and quite limiting and only certain kinds of practice were seen to be legitimate community cultural development. And this had an effect of alienating a lot of people. It certainly alienated a lot of practitioners who felt their work was no longer being recognized as legitimate.

E: Not recognized because they weren’t being funded? I mean they were applying for funding...is that generally how they weren’t being recognized?

D: They weren’t being funded. But also they were just not being acknowledged.

E: Right, so they were working on the fringes, but really on the fringes were no-one’s even taking any notice?

D: Yeah partly that. Or their work was being noticed, but it was not seen to be community cultural development by the bureaucrats in the Australia Council. While it’s always been a bureaucratic invention that’s not to say that it doesn’t have its own life in the real world. Of course it does. But one of the problems I think with the sector has been that they have always relied on the Board or the Committee or whatever particular manifestation it’s been in, to be the organization, coordinating, rallying force for the sector, which has been very unhealthy. There has been over-dependence by the sector on the Australia Council and I think that’s effectively limited the independence of the sector and their capacity to organize and lobby effectively. Regional Arts Australia is an exception to that. The Community Arts or Community Cultural Development sector is nowhere as near organized, nowhere near as well positioned. I don’t think NACA which was formed in response to the latest attempt to knock off the Australia Council entity – I don’t think NACA’s had a meeting with the Minister yet.

E: Because the Minister’s not interested, not giving them a voice...?

D: I doubt it. I doubt if they’ve even asked.

E: I was just reading that article by Graham Pitts ‘Language, Language’ that it is about the language that CCD has been using and that’s been the problem. It’s been the thorn in their side, and they’re saying ‘it’s too CCD, it’s too restraining. It’s very radical, like it’s welfare radical language.

D: I think they’ve been a number of things that have happened. I think that there was a shift in emphasis to seeing community cultural development as only legitimate if it reached out to disadvantaged communities – that unless you’re working with the poor and dispossessed then you’re not genuinely a community cultural development person. And I think that my attitude is that everyone has a latent creativity of whether they’re
rich or poor, whether they’re black or white. (I’ve repositioned this from the answer below)

E: That’s within the sector itself, the actual practitioners or the people...

D: ...in the bureaucracy – both. But not all practitioners would agree with that. But some did do.

E: So it should really be broadened out to include people who generally wouldn’t be seen as marginalized?

D: Yeah, exactly. But not all of these activities need government funding. I think the language can be very constraining and confusing, but I also think that there was a bigger issue and I think the issue of language glosses over that deeper issue which I think is one of values. I think there are different values at play here. And the values are about on the one hand saying ‘there is the canon of great Art and we will give you access to the canon of great Art, and we will define Greatness according to these criteria

E: who’s we?

D: The Establishment, the Elite, the people in charge who have power. There’s very little recognition of the virtuosity that might exist in other cultures, like for instance of a sirod player or an oud player or a traditional Chinese musician many of whom study for 25 years to become masters. And yet that virtuosity may not be recognized within the established arts institutions, cultural institutions.

E: So how do you broaden out those values systems?

D: Well, you have a conversation about it for a start.

E: With the cultural organizations?

D: Yeah. I think that we need to challenge the assumption that there is one national identity. In community cultural development there’s been an assumption that there are many identities that make up a nation and as an individual you can belong to many different communities. So it really I guess is a view of cultural pluralism versus a cultural monolith.

I think that within the post-modernist thrust the whole notion of standards has been ditched in favour of a bland relativism. My own view is that there is a way of defining virtuosity, but that is defined according to different criteria in various genres and cultures. The virtuosity in an Asian cultural tradition may be defined in a different way from how it’s defined in a Western tradition. A blues musician’s virtuosity is evaluated by the extent to which they are able to convey feeling. You can be a technically beautiful singer like Julie Andrews and be unable to cut it in the blues or fold traditions. Billie Holiday had a small voice with a limited range, but her phrasing her interpretation and her expressiveness are what captivate. Virtuosity is very important in community cultural development. For the arts to be effective in whatever way you want it to be
effective, whether you’re trying to make art for social change, whether your trying to make art as a way of just giving people another way of expressing themselves, whether it’s art to create a sense of community and solidarity. Whatever reason you have, if the art is not good by whatever standards you choose to define ‘good’ then it doesn’t work. If it doesn’t have that capacity to move you and transform and give you a connection then it has failed Art should connect you to other people’s experiences, and help you to imagine what is possible. But if the art isn’t well crafted, if it isn’t true then I don’t think it works as art.

E: Does it really hark back to the cultural values and I mean I know that this a discourse that’s going on and it’s ‘what are our value systems?’ and what you’re saying is pretty much defined by the powers that be, that it’s our cultural heritage and it’s the National Museum and Cook discovered Australia, I mean it’s that canon. So if this debate is being discouraged for whatever reason, for lots of reasons that it’s being discouraged, then if that’s the debate that we need to have, that will shift this move that people are trying to go to, but it sounds like there’s been obstacles to actually be more inclusive, to recognize people that are different, but because the values are the things we’re saying ‘we don’t really know.’ I don’t believe we know what our national values are.

D: I agree with you, and I think that there’s an awful amount of quite cynical political manipulation occurring to effectively undermine what have been our traditional values. I think egalitarianism is a genuine value. I’m not saying Australia is equal. I’m not saying we don’t have class distinctions and wealth distinctions. Of course we do, but we still value egalitarianism. We still hold it as being an essential part of being Australian. What my own experiences and those of my colleagues tell me is that Australian communities don’t like this divisiveness. They don’t like what’s happening in the broader political sphere. They don’t like the stereotyping and marginalizing particularly of Moslem communities. They don’t think that’s Australian.

E: So are people more savvy than they’re being credited for?

D: I think they are. I think they are more savvy. But I think that it is always easy if people are feeling marginalized and isolated to create a scapegoat. And you saw that with Hitler and in Cronulla.

E: Why do they feel marginalized?

D: Well, I think that the young people involved in Cronulla feel marginalized because they’ve got no prospect of employment. Unemployment levels in Western and South Western Sydney amongst young people are pretty high.

E: But in Cronulla it’s fairly affluent

D: But the people that were involved in those riots weren’t necessarily from Cronulla.

E: You mean they came in from the Western suburbs
D; and South Western suburbs

E: Because I understand that there is a population of Moslems who actually live in Cronulla, and so they’re being kind of pushed out.

D: That may be so. But certainly if you feel you have no place, if the coppers pick on you because you look Lebanese, if every time you walked down the street with your friends, you get stopped and searched you start to feel marginalised. If you leave school when you’re 15 because there’s no culture in your family or community which reinforces the value of education you know you’re staring down the barrel of a pretty grim time.

E: It’s kind of...I’m not sure if this is a coincidence, but those Eastern suburbs don’t, and this is the discussion I was having with Arts NSW about, they don’t express a need to have a Regional Arts Board there, and to have Local Government developed community initiatives. And I’m thinking well Western Sydney’s just incredibly vibrant but you’ve got a locality, a region that desperately needs it, but they’re saying from the ground ‘no we don’t’

D: Are you talking about those very wealthy communities like Paddington and Woollahra? I think there is a Cultural Officer at Woollahra Council, I think there is, and they may not be there anymore.

E: So is it like there are community initiatives that are being encouraged?

D: Well, I don’t know. I’ve never lived in the Eastern suburbs, so I don’t know. But also it’s not uncommon for people of a certain class to, and a certain level of income, to treat art and culture as a commodity so it’s seen as another retail experience you go and purchase what you want. You don’t make it yourself, you don’t experience it yourself. You’re not participating you are observing – you are a spectator.

E: Do you think there’s a need there for people from the professional classes?

D: I think there’s a need for everyone to express their creativity, as I said to you before. But what I’m saying is that there is, like everything else in our lives, this form of expression has become commodified. So, people will go out in the Eastern suburbs, and they will buy paintings. And that’s part of their way of participating if you like.

E: It is community engagement...

D: On one level, but it’s not necessarily releasing your own creativity. They’ll go to the Opera, or they’ll go to the Ballet or they’ll go to wherever they go

E: So where do they go to scream, cry and

D: I don’t know, maybe they go to night clubs to do that
E: or they go to hospital

D: Or they take drugs

E: Yes, I think this is a very interesting area. Because fundamentally the academic world is being split apart by race and ethnicity. And you can’t help but constantly bump up against this, because there’s been a hegemony and it’s been challenged to say ‘wait a minute, there’s other people here’

D: Well, if you look at the Eastern suburbs and again I can’t speak with any authority about the Eastern suburbs because I’ve never lived there and I don’t really understand it, I’ve never worked in the Eastern suburbs. But there is also a very strong Jewish tradition in those suburbs. And the Jews have always understood and appreciated the value of their direct participation in creativity. Members of the Jewish community are great patrons of the arts in terms of attendance, but also in terms of philanthropy, great traditions there. I suspect it’s a different kind of experience to be Jewish in the Eastern suburbs than it is to be Anglo in Baulkham Hills where those kind of cultural traditions are not so apparent.

E: Well it’s a very strong community I’d imagine and that’s what reinforces your identity and the social cohesion, the culture that keeps people together

D: Absolutely. I went to the Sydney Jewish Choir performance a couple of months ago were originally from Russia. The Great Hall at Sydney University was full up of people listening to the choir and those people were very obviously a community. Donald Horne once advised me that when I was talking about class and culture that I should be very careful about the language. He advised that the ruling classes were not going to the Opera and the Ballet but at home reading Harold Robbins.

E: But the gatekeepers of the values system I don’t know who those people are, but there are the people who have control

D: It is a way of marking your class mobility to acquire those kinds of trappings of refinement taste and distinction.

E: And this divide between the community practitioner; who as far as I can tell are professional artists, and the professional artist who says ‘no, I’m above that’ I mean that really intrigues me, because if you are aligned to community, you’re suddenly seen to be less than...

D: Well I think it comes back to that issue of quality and virtuosity. And I think the sector has been less than honest. It hasn’t really tackled that issue of virtuosity and quality. It’s hedged it.

E: When you say virtuosity, you actually mean that there is a standard of skill and excellence. So you may start off; and this is my observation having working in community arts as well, that you may start with no skills, and then because you are
working as a choir or whatever the art form is, you are actually engaging and your
developing a skill. And there’s people that actually automatically become very, very
good. And I suppose there is that rise to some level where suddenly you are getting the
accolades and recognition. You may be able to make an income from it. So suddenly
there is that distancing from where the seeding and all the energy that promoted the
person is left behind, and it’s seen to be something that isn’t of a standard, because there
is professionalism. And it’s almost like an invisible divide and once you cross over it,
suddenly you are above that, and that’s where I kind of think...

D: But I think that’s true take a painter like Susan Norrie, she is a bloody good painter.
And I know from my work in community arts or community cultural development that
when you are working with an artist who knows their stuff, your capacity for creativity
and self expression is really enhanced as an amateur if I can use that term

E: By being in close proximity and that person allows you to engage with them

D: Yes, and they’re skillful. And they can say to me ‘well Deborah, if you pull in your
lower abdominal muscles support the note and open the soft palette, you’ll sound better’
and it’s true. Or in the case of a visual artist there’s a wonderful story of, there’s a
beautiful artist in South Australia called Cath Cantlon and I just adore her, and she does
a lot of work with all sorts of groups in prisons and various forms of institutions. She
told me about when she was working with women who had been victims of domestic
violence. And the whole project was a joke, because she’d been given this teensy
weeny amount of time to be with them. But she did her best. And she was working with
women who were absolutely terrified about painting anything, or drawing anything, and
so she coped with it in different ways. She suggested to one of them that they use
collage as it’s a less threatening kind of medium. With another woman who was even
too terrified to do that, she just talked her through her experiences, and got the woman to
draw a plan of a house. And then she encouraged the woman to write on top of the plan
what had happened to her in each of those rooms. And Cath said when that exhibition
was toured to a lot of community health centers in South Australia, she said that
particular example I’ve given you of the house plan with the notes on it elicited such a
powerful response from anybody that saw it, whether they were victims of domestic
violence or not. Because it just spoke to them directly and so powerfully. Now that to
me is where an artists working in partnership with if I can use the term a non-artist or an
amateur, can really open up avenues of creativity and self expression. Another example
I’d use is if the only theatre you have ever seen is amateur dramatic society renditions of
‘The Importance of Being Ernest’ and ‘HMAS Pinafore’ that’s all you know. But if you
have a professional theatre Director who can expose you to other ways of performing
other genres, other styles, then a whole new world of possibilities opens up. You may
still be more comfortable in a more traditional drawing room comedy style of theatre
and that’s fine. But you’ve also suddenly been given more options. So, I don’t think
we’re at the stage that communities are going to spontaneously rise up and demand the
resources they need to express themselves creatively. But if they’re shown what the
possibilities are, and they come to experience that, they’ll never go back.
E: I’m kind of getting to a thing with people who are artists, that there is a very specific type of artist who has an understanding about community and also how to build community, and that’s something that isn’t... I don’t know whether you learn it or whether you understand, or you know it or something, but what you do is that you actually facilitate and you enable. And I think that’s where there seems to be this division of the person who is a professional artist, but their concern and passion is to build a people – it’s a people thing rather than a product?

D: But I don’t think it’s that black and white. I think there are artists who move in and out of different forms of practice in their life. And they are quite comfortable doing that. The more traditional artist, working on their own, making their own work in whatever way that they do may be quite comfortable teaching because it helps pay the rent. And from time to time they may want to move into a more collaborative, more democratic if you like, exchange of skills with non-artists.

E: Because the problem with that is that there is a control issue and when you are the person with the skills there’s almost a co-dependency that you need to have people looking to you as being the one that has the answers, or you made it because you’ve exhibited or you’ve recorded.

D: But they do have the skills

E: They do have the skills but there’s something that kind of stops people from understanding that there is a way to be enabled that isn’t about looking to something to give them recognition and approval and that’s where I’m a little bit stuck with this thing about artworkers and people that do have skills and it’s really more about the accolades if you know what I’m saying. I feel like I need to work through that, because it can be a disempowering thing to actually have the people who have the skills but it is about them, it’s not about something else which is the organic process or something that isn’t really...

D: Well I guess that depends on their motivation for being involved in collaborative practice in the first place: The extent to which they are prepared to share power and control

E: Yeah, it’s hard. It’s hard to say ‘what I do is fine, it’s good and people pay lots of money or they come and listen to me. But it’s hard to let that go and let somebody else possibly pass you if that’s what’s going to happen. I mean it’s almost an impossible thing I think.

D: Well I don’t agree with you. I think there are plenty of artists who do that all the time. I think one of the criticisms though in community arts or community cultural development is that only those artists who are lousy work in that area because there’s nowhere else for them to go. And certainly you’ll hear that view expressed quite vociferously by people like Scott Rankin the writer.

E: Big hArt
D: Yeah. I’ve been involved in the sector for 26 years and I know plenty of artists who can cut the mustard in whatever field they choose to work in. And it can be really inspiring to work with somebody who really does know their art form and can help you discover things about yourself.

E: Yes I think it’s that educational role. It just happened that ‘Insight’ had that discussion about teachers and I don’t think it’s a coincidence that teachers are really undervalued because they’re not seen to be doing anything that’s important, like university lecturers. I mean there is a hierarchy and when you look at what people do, it’s just so important because it’s not about them or recognition of what they do. It’s what they’re doing which is to facilitate and to enable and I think that educational role is – art is educational or the potential of it to be facilitating people provides a powerful agency. And I think it can be frightening too because suddenly people do find their voice and are politically and socially engaged then anything...you’re inviting chaos in a sense because it’s very difficult to control that.

D: And you’re certainly inviting an upsetting of the status quo. There’s a wonderful story of a woman that was involved in a project called the ‘Sea grass Story’ which took place in Hastings in Westernport Bay in Victoria in the 1980’s and it involved a puppeteer by the name of Ian Cumming and a number of other artists. Ian’s father was a scientist and was concerned about the proposal to allow oil tankers into Westernport Bay and it was felt that development would upset the very delicate ecology of that bay where the sea grass formed a very important part of the food chain: It was a very significant expanse of sea grass in terms of world ecology. So Ian decided to do this project called the Sea grass Story which involved working with members of the community which included school kids to devise a public performance piece on the beach beautiful puppets and music and the usual kind of thing. And he did that each year over a period of 3 years and there’s a documentary made of it and there’s a lovely young woman, long red hair – you see her in the beginning and she said ‘I’m just a housewife’ and by the end of that 3 year process she had become a lot more articulate and a lot more confident. The whole community had become much more aware of this issue. They voted out the pro-development Council and voted in much more environmentally aware Council and that young woman went on to represent that area in State Parliament. So, I mean that’s just an example of what it can do

E: What’s possible

D: Exactly, exactly. And there’s another project I was thinking the other day where FILEF the Federation of Italian workers sponsored a work by Denis del Favero. I saw his name the other day; he’s a photographer and visual artist. We (The Board) provided some money to bring in a young trainee writer who went on to become a professional writer.

*End of tape*
VI. Michael Raw Transcript

Michael Goss, Program Manager Museums and Capital Infrastructure, Arts NSW
Interview recorded in Michael’s office
3 October 2006

E: I’m with Michael Goss at Arts NSW and it’s the 3rd of October. And Michael Goss could you repeat what your position is?

M: I’m Program Manager Museums and Capital Infrastructure. I have a lateral brief for a range of policies and projects to do with cultural development in country NSW, relations with local government, cultural planning and arts development in general. I work across different art form programs and categories. My main areas of responsibility are the Museums, Capital Infrastructure, City of the Arts and Community Cultural Development (CCD) programs that provides funding for cultural facilities in NSW, not just in country NSW and special initiatives such as cultural planning and relations with local government. A broad brief, with a focus on country arts development.

E: So in terms of the City Centre, do you actually cover that area too?

M: Under the Capital Infrastructure, Museums programs and cultural planning, yes. I deal with Museums in metropolitan Sydney. I also deal with Capital Infrastructure programs and that can work across all the art forms and on occasion if there are issues to do with cultural planning, projects in Parramatta, Willoughby and Erskinville.

E: So your major brief is cultural planning would you say?

M: Cultural development

E: What is the difference between cultural development and planning?

M: Cultural planning is a specific project for which I gave you “Cultural Planning Guidelines for Local Government” July 2004. This was an initiative of the former Ministry for the Arts and the Department of Local Government. There are 151 local governments in NSW which are required to develop Social and Community Plans as part of an ongoing process of planning in local government. The aim of the Guidelines is to ensure that culture and arts development become part of the social and community planning process. Released in July 2004, they have already had a significant impact on the way councils work and think about the arts.

E: Does that mean that they’re making more of a concerted effort to incorporate cultural planning in their...

M: A lot of councils have cultural responsibilities but these tend to develop one at a time and quite often as separate entity or silo. So it’s not unusual to find a major regional
council with a museum, a library, a gallery, maybe quite a broad community arts program which might include some funding for the local festivals; a whole range of things. But they’ve never actually sat down and thought ‘well just a minute. We have all of these different cultural responsibilities and enterprises, but really we should be thinking holistically about them. How can we manage all of them and start to marshal all of the resources towards a particular strategy or a series of common objectives.’

E: Are you saying because they’ve got the guidelines, they’re actually providing the strategy?

M: That’s right, although it’s still up to the councils to do the planning. It’s up to them to think it through. Given the already established guidelines for developing community plans, we want to encourage councils to include cultural planning as part of that planning process. So it was dovetailing into an existing local government process, but with a particular perspective on cultural development.

E: Do you know how many councils have actually implemented cultural plans?

M: We have received cultural plans from 63 councils so far, just over a third of the State’s 151 councils. We’re aware that a similar number of councils are in the process of developing cultural plans. And the remainder are predominantly the small shires...Councils vary in size from Blacktown, with a population of 200,000 to shire councils west of the Divide with populations of 3, 4, 5,000 people, of which only 6 or 700 of them are ratepayers. It will take a little longer for them to develop plans and we may even look in the next year or so at providing some incentive for them to work collectively. Why should 2 or 3 small shires with limited resources have separate plans? It may be more constructive to encourage them to develop single sub regional or rural cultural plan. A lot of councils work collectively on tourism. And NSW Tourism has tourist divisions throughout the whole state and those divisions are made up of groups of councils that have agreed to cooperate on an area like tourism. They then relate into the Department of Tourism here and there’s a whole range of programs and advice and information that the Department provides them to promote tourism in their region.

E: So where the cultural plans are actually being activated and councils are being proactive, what would you say are the factors that are assisting in the process? Is it because they’ve got cultural development staff or is it because...?

M: No it’s because a lot of councils to their surprise and a lot of other people’s surprise, have over the last 20 or 30 years built up quite substantial cultural budgets. They have gradually made substantial investments in the arts. And when we’re talking about the arts and local government, we’re also talking about libraries, museums, galleries, public halls, community arts facilities, neighborhood centers, youth centers. There are a whole range of facilities you’ll find in a local government area which are in a very general way, have an art focus, or have an arts resource. They may not solely be an arts enterprise like a gallery, but they could be a public hall which is the only venue in that particular town or locality for any arts organization to meet for cultural activities, a music group to get
together and have a rehearsal or put on a performance, right down to school groups wanting to go somewhere to have their annual concert.

E: It sounds from what you’re saying if the council does make budgetary provisions then they will provide the cultural services to their local communities?

M: Yes. Quite often they’ve done this over the years, it’s evolved. It’s evolved in response to community expectations, community pressure, political campaigns; somebody in the council has had a good idea. But it’s quite often council will move down that path, make some significant outlays in the cultural area but have never actually sat down and said ‘well just a minute. What are all our areas of involvement in culture and how can we think about developing them and using them in a more strategic way.’ Instead of letting each one developing as a separate silo.

E: A number of people who I have spoken to are in local government, and there seems to be a perception that it is up to the community to come up with apart from the Social and Community Plan which is a consultative process, but there’s kind of a perception that the community should say ‘we want this arts or cultural program’ and lobby...

M: The community has been arguing for the arts in local government for decades. It’s quite often local government itself that’s very resistant to that, and having said that I equally say that it’s local government who’s been a leader in this area. So you get a very mixed thing. You will get some councils that are very progressive, and you’ll get other councils which are not necessarily against the arts, it’s just something that they haven’t got involved in. There hasn’t been a group of councilors, or the council simply hasn’t come under any expectation that they should provide resources in this area. And it can vary dramatically. There are some very well established and quite prosperous metropolitan councils that do very little in the cultural area. And they do very little partly because their ratepayers are quite happy with the status quo.

E: So where there are proactive councils, do you know what the defining...?

M: They’re responding to community expectations.

E: So what’s making those communities different from the others who say ‘well, it doesn’t really matter.’

M: There’s a whole range of things; prosperity is a big factor at the moment.

E: OK so where the communities are doing well

M: Yes

E: economically then they’re going to be more proactive.

M: Yes, but equally where communities are disadvantaged, and I’m thinking of some of the communities west of the Divide where you have communities with declining
populations, or communities like Newcastle or Wollongong who have had to completely transform themselves: They were old industrial sea port towns and over the last 20 years have had to transform themselves. One of the catalysts for economic change has been cultural development and community cultural development. Arts NSW’s underlying strategy is to integrate cultural development into community development and work with those councils and those communities who want to do that, to encourage them. You can’t force anyone to become involved in the arts. It is up to the local community.

E: With the community cultural development, is that an Arts NSW articulated policy?

M: Apart from the State’s cultural institutions, the principle way we work with all of our clients in this state is through our incentive programs, which is essentially our funding programs. We don’t aim to provide any of the organizations we work with, with all the funds they need. All we can do is provide catalyst funds and development funds, and what we call core operational funds to key organizations. That is the incentive, that’s why people ring us up and come and talk to us. If you look at our annual report, you’ll see in the appendix at the back where those grants go and what they go for. And that means that at any given time as well as providing funding to 151 local governments for their libraries, we also in any given year, we’re dealing with about half the local governments of NSW, let say 75, and we’re providing them with funding which can vary from $10,000 through to several million dollars for projects. The majority of the projects we’re involved in are relatively small on the scale of funding we’re working in is in the scale of 5, 10, 15 to about $100,000.

E: And that’s libraries, it could be community cultural development?

M: Well this is apart from libraries. We deal with the libraries – there’s a quite clearly defined libraries stream of funding which is about 26, 27 million dollars a year, and that is administered for us by the State Library and the Libraries Association. But wherever you go in this state, the libraries are a key cultural resource and have a direct bearing on community attitudes, particularly resources such as museums and galleries, and to any organization that’s involved in collecting and documenting; family history, social history, community history. So though we deal with that as a separate entity, it parallels everything we do in the cultural area, in the cultural grants area.

E: I am particularly interested in the community cultural development sector because I do understand there are a few changes which are occurring in probably how people perceive what community cultural development is. So from your perspective, how do you see it operating?

M: It started out as community arts in the ‘70’s, evolved in the ‘80’s community cultural development (CCD) is presently being transformed by the Commonwealth Government into community partnerships - a new language for CCD. There’s a change if you like; community arts was very hands on – it was about getting in there with the community and doing things. Community cultural development broadened that and said ‘well, there’s a whole range of activity. It’s about working with the community to enable them to develop their own projects and develop their own approach to the kind of culture that they would like in their region and something that was specific to their region and was
expressive of their region.’ Community cultural development found an enormous fertile ground in local government across Australia. And one of the reasons the whole understanding of community cultural development is changing, is that in the ‘80’s and ‘90’s it was to a very large extent driven by the Australia Council and the state arts authorities and now it’s increasingly driven by local government to the point where I question the degree to which it is necessary for us to be involved in that area.

E: Does that mean it doesn’t need to be funded?

M: No it means that we need to approach it differently. We need to have a less direct relationship with individual practitioners of CCD and maybe with specific CCD organizations and a more general relationship with the local government as a whole in this state, with key service organizations that can work with local governments and... We don’t need to be there holding anybody’s hand anymore. We can step back. We certainly need to be looking at how we can strategically help the CCD sector. But I’m aware of councils that employ full time Community Cultural Development Officers. They in turn have Youth Arts Development Officers. There’s a degree of expertise out there now in local government that’s able to work with communities and cultural development quite independently of the State and the Commonwealth.

E: What is the expectation of community cultural development? What is the best outcome?

M: The best outcome is when a community decides to work with its local government and develop and implement their own projects according to their own...community can vary from a group of artists to an arts organization, to a group with specific needs. It could be Elderly Citizens, it could be people with disabilities, it could be people from new and emerging ethnic communities in western Sydney like the Laotian community or the Sudanese community; it could be Indigenous communities and within the Indigenous area it could be a specific community in metropolitan Sydney, or a specific community in the Far West or up on the Mid North Coast, or down on the Far South Coast.

E: I suppose it is about those communities having a voice that engages with local government, and that’s what you’re saying is the best indicator of CCD working, rather than local government saying ‘well, we’re going to find out what the community wants’ and initiate it. So it’s initiated from the community because they have become engaged and involved in what’s going on locally.

M: You’re also getting a sea change within local government staff. When I first became involved in this area in the ‘70’s councils were run by Town Clerks, and they were all run as fortresses and they were quite often run by people who had gone into local government at the age of 16 and stayed there all their lives and were proud of it. Now you meet young people in local government who have the same expectations right across NSW as well educated young people in Sydney – they don’t see why they shouldn’t go overseas for their holidays; they don’t see why they shouldn’t have access to a library, or a gallery, or a whole range of cultural activities as a matter of course. They think it’s just as important to have access to those things as it is to a swimming pool, or a sports
centre. And local government by and large now accepts that. There are still a few councils out there that if you like, taking a long time to come round to that view, but certainly the staff of local government is now very well educated, very well informed, very well traveled, very savvy and I’m continually impressed by councils ability to develop their own projects, develop their own ideas, work in a very sophisticated and ambitious way. They come to us for advice and for catalyst funding and also if they can go back and argue to their community that the State Government thinks this project’s a good idea, and that can be just a small community project involving 15 or 20,000 or a multi purpose art centre that’s going to cost $20 or $30 million, that somehow makes it easier at the local level, to convince the other councilors, to reassure the community that this is ratepayers money well spent.

E: With community cultural development shifting to community partnerships
M: Yes
E: how do you see that changing?
M: That’s a current and recent debate and in a sense, that’s why I’ve given you a copy of Regional Arts Australia’s National Directions Regional Arts 2006 by Anne Dunn. This is something that Regional Arts Australia, the Australia Council and the State arts authorities are working on this year and it foreshadows developments in the next 3-5 years, it’s a debate that’s evolving. In other words, as the relative interest of the different sectors of government change in community and cultural development, so we start to rethink our position and our approach.

E: It sounds like this is being driven from the ground?
M: One of the interesting things that have come out of Anne Dunn’s report is the need for us to work with remote and small regional communities. The larger regional centers like Albury and Wagga and Orange and Bathurst and Dubbo and Lismore and Tamworth, have a history of arts development going back 50 or 60 years. In a sense their councils have budgets which are large enough and resources that are substantial enough for them to stand on their own feet and develop their own objectives. If they want to spend $8.5 million dollars on a new library and museum, they can do that. It’s more an issue of priority – you want to spend that on a museum and library or does the community want to spend that on an aquatic centre. And sometimes they do both at the same time. What the Commonwealth Government has identified through this report is that there’s a whole range of smaller communities in country Australia, and let’s for argument’s sake to say that they’re communities under 20,000 or though more typically they would communities of 1,2,3,5,7 and 10,000; that feel a distinct sense of disadvantage for one reason or another – don’t feel that they’re getting their fair share of access to government support for a community development and a cultural development, and are saying to the Commonwealth - and it’s very clear in this study- that first of all in a small community, nearly all cultural development is driven by volunteers or community groups. And it’s one of the unstated facts of life in the arts today now, that if you want government support, you really need to be a professional arts person; there’s
no way round the fact that having the qualifications and the training, and the experience in the arts... or you need to have very direct access to a professional arts officer who is experienced in this area. Because though there’s an enormous amount of funding available across the board from all levels of government, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics is quite clear on this, it’s been an absolutely quantum increase in the level of expenditure from all levels of government in the cultural sector right across Australia. So on the one hand we have a situation where funding is very readily available, on the other hand, we have an increasing number of individual artists and communities who would like that funding, and on the other hand as it becomes more competitive, it becomes more and more difficult for small and disadvantaged communities to access that funding. And so, this report in a sense is saying ‘well let’s move our support, not away from, but let’s direct it in a more focused way towards those community groups, to empower those community groups, and we’ll still have the funding for the professional artist. We’ll still have the funding for the professional arts worker. But what about a small arts group in a community in a country community, that can really only work on a volunteer basis. That maybe there’s one officer in the council who’s responsible for all community services and really has no background in the arts that they can relate to at the local government level – how can they possibly get a hearing in the capital cities, let alone in Canberra and the Australia Council. And this is what I think what Anne Dunn is trying to address in the report. And though there may be a political agenda underlying this from the Commonwealth Government’s point of view, I don’t have a problem with that. The big problem in this country is when the powers that be are not interested in cultural development. It’s the indifference historically in the 1950’s and ‘60’s of State and Federal Governments to the arts that was the real problem in the past. So anything that activates, and I’m speaking here as a public servant, but anything that stimulates and activates political interest in supporting the arts for whatever agenda and whatever reason is basically a good thing. It’s a consensus area. There’s a very high level of cooperation between all levels of government. That doesn’t mean to say we don’t have our different objectives and policies. Our more adept clients are very good at sensing what those are and seeking out the opportunities. But the art sector tends to be one where there’s a high level of consensus and agreement between state and commonwealth government and between local governments.

E: With the Commonwealth Government organizations apart from the Australia Council, which government departments are you actually linked in with?

M: Through our Cultural Grants Program we work with from 2 to 300 different organizations a year in this state. In a way the Arts NSW’s Cultural Grants Program is a form of cultural mapping and scoping, because every year we receive up to a thousand applications that provide an overview of cultural projects and plans. Every year we ask a series of peer group committees to spend 1, 2, 3 days at a time, going through each of those applications whether it’s for theatre, music, visual arts and craft, literature and history which are read, discussed evaluated and recommended for support. Over time we build relationships with organizations across the State, whether it’s the Bathurst Council or one of its cultural enterprises like the Bathurst Regional Gallery or a specific artist living and working in Bathurst who is seeking support. And that tends then to give us an overlay into a range of other government agencies. There’s a whole area of funding that
has to do with youth and social justice. There’s a whole range of funding that addresses issues of disadvantage. There’s funding that overlaps into the tourism area; arts funding leads us into a whole range of different agencies. And it’s essentially that funding that gives us the relationship with local government

E: This is the applicants?

M: Yes.

E: Right. So how is that working with the Federal Government Agencies?

M: Because the clients we deal with particularly our major clients – rarely obtain all the funding they need from one source.

E: Oh, ok

M: So if you have an enterprising arts organization, not only are they getting some funding from their council, they’re also getting some funding from us and they’re also getting some funding from the Commonwealth.

E: Does that mean that you actually integrate how you deliver the...?

M: We talk to each other a lot.

E: Because of applicants that are shared between the different organizations?

M: It’s not unusual for me to be talking to first of all the clients on the ground, then to the 2 or 3 other organizations that the client has applied to for funding. Because they’re seeking funding for a single project and that’s where the cooperation comes in. Because it’s in the Commonwealth’s interest to maximize the benefit of its funding. It will often say to its clients ‘look we’ll give you some funding, but we want you to get some funding from other sources.’ We make a similar thing on many of our programs. We say ‘look we want matching funding.’ We don’t mind where you get it from. If the Orange Council will match our grant, fine. If the Commonwealth will match it, fine.

E: Do you actually liaise yourself, or you’ll leave it up to the applicant to do it?

M: The onus is always on the applicant. But when you are identifying a good project and the bigger the project, the more important this becomes. If the mix of Federal State and Local Government funding varies, it can have an immediate impact at the State level. A variation of 1-3% in orchestra funding can impact on State cultural budgets around the whole country. So, there are key areas where we have relationships with the Commonwealth. There are equally a whole set of other areas where we have relationships with local government. Sometimes they overlap.
E: But it’s always instigated by the applicant rather than a proactive initiative taken by a Federal Government agency to contact you and say ‘there is this agenda or issue.’ So it’s not at that level that it’s working, it’s more from who is applying and the projects that...

M: It’s a complex circle, given that the overall level of arts activity in Australia all levels of government have to respond to the arts industry and at the same time provide leadership and incentive for growth and change.

E: Yes and I suppose initiatives are driven by individuals, from what you’re saying. With the Regional Arts Australia study that would have been commissioned by...

M: That was the result of a series of focus group discussions that were conducted across Australia in the second half of last year, and Anne Dunn went everywhere and organized basically focus groups to come in and sit around a table and talk. This report was the subject of a summit meeting at Parliament house on the 10th of August this year, chaired by Senator Kemp, Minister for the Arts, and he as good as stood up and said ‘Look, I can’t promise anything, but I think this is the way we’re going to go next year, in the run up to the Federal Election.

E: The research informs the policy?

M: That’s right. These two are very good examples of strategic initiatives which are coming out of all of the work that is done at the different levels, by the different funding authorities when they fund arts organizations.

E: Ok. So does Australia need a Cultural Policy bearing out that it seems to just happen?

M: Yes, I agree with David Throsby, Chair, NSW Cultural Arts Advisory Council. The process of developing cultural policy is as important as the policy itself. Cultural policy and planning does not necessarily bring about change unless they establish broad consensus and reflect community aspirations.’

E: So having an overriding umbrella national policy, would that somehow bring in to line...

M: I would argue that we have a floating national cultural policy that is evolving from year to year. The Cultural Ministers Council brings together State Arts Ministers and senior directors, the Federal Minister for the Arts and the New Zealand Minister for the Arts several times a year to discuss national policy. The Australia Council, the national bodies supported by the Commonwealth and the State governments developing their own parallel policies. There is a collective debate going on about cultural development as a matter of course in Australia to a degree that happens in very few countries in the world, and to a certain extent we take it for granted. In a very Australian way we take it for granted.

E: What direction is that taking from your perspective?
M: Every 10 years the language of government changes and evolves. And when I talk about the language of government it’s the arguments to government that seem to work. In the ‘80’s up to ’93, there were a set of cultural policy arguments that gained traction with political parties at both the Federal and State level. And they were essentially arguments to do with community cultural development and multicultural development. I’ve always thought of 1988, the Centenary of Federation as being the nadir and the kind of point at which community cultural development...it was essentially a community cultural development festival - the Centenary of Federation. The Federal Government released substantial funds for touring, celebration, tall ships and festivals. The 1990’s recession prompted a gradual change, saw the introduction of new DOCITA programs culminated in the Centenary of Federation. We’re now moving into a period where all levels of government are endeavoring to be more strategic about cultural development. In NSW it has to do with the new NSW State Plan. Our work will become very much part of the NSW State Plan which has 5 - 6 key areas.

E: I’m just wondering how much the idea of ‘creative industries’ is a formative, or an influential idea in terms of where it’s going?

M: Interestingly tourism is now been made part of State and Regional Development, tourism is a key industry for State and Regional Development. The NSW Film and Television Office is now part of Tourism and State and Regional Development.

E: Ok, I am interested in how far we are going to go down the track of creative industries in terms of the impact...so, that culture is something that we need to nurture and promote because it actually does have a return.

M: Before Refshauge retired, he gave every member of cabinet a copy of Richard Florida’s book ‘Creative Cities.’ We understand his ideas were of interest. Although his perspective is particular to America, they’ve nevertheless had an impact in Australia. Florida argues that the more diverse a community, the stronger the economy. And that isn’t diversity in an ethnic or racial sense; it’s diversity in terms of skills, professional resources, cultural facilities, communications and IT. It’s the mix, and it’s the antithesis of that whole approach to planning which is represented by Walter Burley Griffin and Canberra at the turn of the 19th and 20th century: Where the ideal city was a city where you had everyone living over here in their leafy suburbs, and you had the Government over here in another area, and then you had the factories over here in another area. Each suburb stratified according to a certain function and income. Florida argues that the greater the diversity, the greater the tolerance, the richer the society, the more likely the community is to grow and prosper.

E: Do you think that is on the table?

M: I think as a general idea it is, and I think there will always be within certain sectors an argument for arts and cultural development in its own right. But once you move out of particular sectors into the wider sector of government, you have to join forces with all the other arguments. For instance within the education sector, there’s ample argument for the need for providing young people at all levels with access to cultural expression
and training. Studies show that children who have access to arts education do better at mathematics, and do better. It’s part of the common understanding of education these days. So you can mount persuasive and strong arguments for expenditure on the arts and cultural development within the education sector in its own right. If you then want to move that argument across to the whole of government, whether it’s local, state or federal, a broader argument is required, and with community development, urban development, urban renewal; small communities undergoing substantial demographic and economic change? The arts are labor intensive; about content, skills and ability, in my view a key area for economic growth. We need to continue to make greater investment in education; well being and education.

E: So in those communities where it is obviously less than satisfactory where the shops are closing and it’s not a vibrant kind of place to be and there aren’t opportunities, what is the role for Arts NSW or State Government to regenerate...?

M: The role is to work with local government to let them come and tell us either directly or through the various arts organizations that they work with in their community, the kind of assistance they would need and for us to look at how to help them.

E: So they would need to identify either through the Social and Community Plan through local government...?

M: For instance, Arts Northern Rivers has successfully sought assistance from Arts NSW to daft a Creative Industries Strategy. The N-East is a rapidly growing regional area in NSW, claims to have the highest per capita population of artists including many people working in the film and media industries.

E: How does that, and I’m just wondering that being the case, how does that translate to another region that just doesn’t have that concentration of creative practitioners?

M: Broken Hill’s population has declined from just under 30,000 in 1980 to about 20,983. It has had to transform itself from a mining town to a tourist, retirement and service centre for the Far West. 120 films have been shot there in the past 15 years and a thriving local arts and crafts industry personified by the Brushmen of the Bush

E: So do you think that creative industries strategy that is obviously successful there is a model which is translatable?

M: Yes.

E: Right

M: It is particular to Broken Hill but many other communities in Australia have to deal with change from rapid decline to rapid growth. Broken Hill’s population declined dramatically, but nevertheless the city was able to turn its economy around to the point where it is a major Outback tourist destination. It’s a place where people make films. It has a marvelous new gallery. It has one of the oldest collections in the country. It has
several museums. It has something like 200 people in the town who make a living out of painting pictures and making things. It has a series of festivals and it has a tourist industry which keeps the motels full.

E: And is that driven by local government? What are the initiatives going on there that actually foster and promote what’s going on?

M: Everything. The whole town.

E: Not just local government?

M: You can’t do anything in Broken Hill without everybody in the town knowing about it.

E: So it is a community that’s working together?

M: Yes

E: But they are also linking into local government?

M: and federal government and state government

E: Yes. This is what I seem to be finding that people in local government saying there are key people within the community who are the drivers

M: Ah yes, they’re your leaders

E: The leaders. And these are the people that they’re looking for in terms of showing the way...

M: Unless you can find a project leader, often a country woman or a motivated group of people, the funding in itself will not get the project off the ground. I have watched motivated community groups completely change the status quo in their respective communities and councils regarding the need for cultural facilities, projects and activities. Persuade councils that were firmly against the construction of theatres, galleries and arts resources to change their minds and carry out ambitious projects running into many millions of dollars.

E: So he’s got a go ahead vision?

M: Yes. And you either need a strong and visionary General Manager, or Mayor preferably both. But sometimes it’s just one lone voice on the council that for one reason or another has worked out that there’s a local constituency for a particular group, and they and again, it’s generally a woman, they hang in there with that group until they get their way.

E: So it’s persistence and a drive to see it through?
M: Any of the projects I’m working on, we support have time scales of 3, 5, 7, 10 years.

E: When you do find that there is that conflict I suppose or tension, that there is a lone voice that is representing the community, and the local government General Manager, the elected staff aren’t on board, how do you work with that?

M: We have to be very careful; we have to be very diplomatic. But it’s a question of encouraging without committing, of recognizing on occasion an apparently conservative councils can do a surprising and generous about face on its support for the arts.

E: With the persistence?

M: Dubbo has a 20 year history of community groups arguing for a cultural centre and theatre which was largely resisted by the council until recently. They are about to open one of the largest and best cultural centers in country NSW at cost of approximately $8.5 million to refurbish and extend the old Dubbo High School; with a gallery, a museum and a community arts centre where any and every arts group in that town will have space to meet and do whatever they want to do. And at the same time have made an in principle decision to build a new 500 seat theatre for an estimated cost of $17.5 million.

E: Something changed?

M: It’s part of this sea change. What Dubbo does will hopefully influence attitudes and plans for cultural development in Griffith, Parkes and Grenfell and other towns in the Mid West; if it works in Wagga, perhaps it will work for Bathurst and Orange and vice versa.

E: What I found interesting about the Northern Rivers is that I think 7 Councils actually did get together to work on different strategies. Is that happening in this belt that you’re talking about?

M: It’s happening in all of these regions. Because the map of the State’s RADO regions represents groups of councils that have agreed to work together to establish a Regional Arts Board and to co-fund with Arts NSW the employment of a regional arts development officer (RADO).

E: So generally you are finding throughout NSW that those councils...

M: There are two small groups but we are talking to them about joining the State network.

E: They don’t have a Regional Arts Board?

M: Griffith, Nerandera and Leeton.
E: And that map will actually say the councils that are working together. Because I think that’s a key...

M: Yes, if you go into their website, you’ll get the print out. But you can see here the councils that have agreed.

E: So that’s the coloring of the councils that are working together as Regional Arts Boards overseeing...?

M: Yes, we deal with the Lower Hunter, the Central Coast and the Illawarra separately. They are distinct growth areas.

E: Correct me if I’m wrong, but I thought that Regional Arts NSW was an independent body?

M: It is yes.

E: But Arts NSW does work in tandem with Regional Arts NSW in terms of funding, with the Regional Arts Boards. Is that the relationship?

M: This, and our funding to Regional Arts NSW and the devolved funding programs we give them, amounts to about $1.7 million a year.

E: So you are effectively a partner?

M: They are a partner

E: With Arts NSW?

M: Yes. They in turn go to the Commonwealth for funding, and through their Regional Arts Boards, all these councils contribute.

E: For some reason I thought Regional Arts NSW owned this whole initiative?

M: They drive it for us

E: They drive it for Arts NSW.

M: We have a small office. We’re not in the business of running things ourselves. We’re in the business of encouraging and supporting and funding other people to do it.

E: Ok. So Regional Arts Australia really came out of the Australia Council?

M: No Regional Arts Australia came out of the all the Arts Councils, and all the States bodies – there’s Regional Arts NSW, there’s the Qld Arts Council, they’ve got slightly different names around the whole state, and they duplicate what we do here, except they don’t have a network which is as highly developed as ours.
E: So Arts NSW as a state body doesn’t have a counterpart in Qld working with Qld Arts Council?

M: Oh yes. There’s Arts Qld, there’s Arts Victoria...

E: And is it the same relationship they’d have with...?

M: Similar

E: Similar, but there are some...

M: Ours is more generally, in terms of this particular network, is more highly developed. Victoria is moving now to develop a similar network. Qld is thinking about it. In South Australia, you have a completely different thing, you have the South Australian Arts Trust, and that’s a different structure – which it’s a different state and has a completely different demography than NSW. It’s got something like 70% of its population around Adelaide, and very few people...

E: So they’ve evolved around the localities and the specific characters?

M: Yes

E: Somebody asked me a question today regarding the RADO’s – so there’s 13 throughout the State and then we worked out CCDNSW has been looking after Western Sydney and Illawarra I think

M: Yes

E: So they were saying, is there a RADO representation RAB in Sydney?

M: No

E: And I wasn’t able to work this one out?

M: No, this model would not work in metropolitan Sydney, there are 4 million people. The need for this model in country NSW is partly because the majority of country council’s do not have the financial resources to employ full time cultural staff or to drive their own agenda for cultural development on their own.

E: So therefore Sydney has a Cultural Development person...?

M: If there are 46 local governments in metropolitan Sydney, most of them have, about half of them have cultural programs. The ones that don’t simply...it’s a group of councils that for one reason or another, their ratepayers haven’t asked for it.
E: Ok so the question was also, if Sydney doesn’t have the same setup that the regions do in terms of access to community arts, then what services are in Sydney for access?

M: Everything, everything.

E: Well I felt that there are groups that are working...

M: Sydney is a metropolitan cultural centre, its people have access to numerous resources, in terms of the cultural institutions, other arts organizations, other artists. Any city is really, of 4 million people, has a collection of resources that you’re not going to find in a community of 5, 10, 15 or 50,000.

E: Would you find them in your own local government area?

M: It varies.

E: So if you were looking for something would you restrict yourself to inner Sydney, or would you think ‘oh well Western Sydney has it, or the Western suburbs...?’

M: It varies. If you go to Cambelltown or Liverpool or Penrith or soon in Parramatta, there are some marvelous cultural resources there; theatres, galleries, museums. Some of the most innovative new libraries are in metropolitan Sydney.

E: Do you know the number of Community Cultural staff that are employed across NSW?

M: I can’t reel it off for you.

E: Is it like in the 20’s or 30’s – there’s 151 local governments in NSW, so across those would it be like 5% or 10...It sounds like it’s an initiative that the local government has to take themselves to say ‘well, we’re actually going to appoint somebody.’

M: Many local governments have a Manager or Director of Community and Cultural Services. Most local governments have Managers of community and social services, and under that heading comes culture. You would need to talk to the Cultural Development Officer at the Local Governments and Shires Association – Chris Hudson. He could give you a break down of professional staff employed by local government. It’s growing. It’s a very positive situation. But it’s uneven. You know, next door to a council with a very proactive cultural program, you may have a council that has relatively little, for the simple reason that the ratepayers feel they can just get in the car and drive into town. It’s taken many of the councils on the North Shore a long time to become involved in the cultural area, and in relation to some of the leading regional centers. This may be because people there feel they can have access to culture without assistance from their councils, by driving across the Bridge, going overseas or making their own arrangements. There isn’t that sense that they need to look to their council and to their community for cultural resources. However, it’s changing, dramatically. Willoughby Council is about to spend over $100 million on a new Civic and Cultural Centre – which
will be the largest project of its kind in NSW when it proceeds. And when you go into the detail of what some of the North Shore councils are doing, you find that they’ve been very proactive at a certain community level in cultural development, but not cultural infrastructure. In fact I can think of a number of councils on the North Shore where theatres have simply closed down in the last 10 or 15 years when they shouldn’t have. Councils like North Sydney should be, not necessarily owning several theatres, but should be facilitating the existence of a group of theatres, and a group of galleries, and a group of a whole range of facilities for its community.

E: Thank you very much for your time, and I really appreciate it.
Stories tell culture, connecting identity with place:
Australian cultural policy and collective creativity

VOLUME 2  Part B

APPENDICES

Elizabeth Slottje

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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1.1 Creative Practitioner Interview Schedule

Interview Areas of Enquiry
The following areas of enquiry will be addressed in interviews using types of questions as set out below:

1. Role
   • What is the title of your position?
   • How would you describe your role?
   • What is your arts training background?
   • How long have you been involved in this kind of arts practice?
   • Describe your role in terms of community arts participation.
   • How is your position funded?
   • Describe your work in your capacity as a professional in community arts practice.

2. Culture/Community
   • What is your definition of culture?
   • What is your definition of community?
   • Describe your experience of community arts practice.
   • Is there a link between community arts practice and enabling individual/collective capacity?
   • Can you give examples of culture being generated through community arts practice?
   • What skills do members learn participating in community arts programs?
   • Is there a link between community arts practice and enabling individual/collective capacity?
   • What skills do members learn participating in community arts programs?

3. Leadership
   • Do you identify as a professional arts practitioner?
   • Do you see yourself as a leader?
   • What is your definition of ‘leadership’?
   • How would you describe the role of leadership within community cultural practice?
   • How do you distinguish between professional arts practice and community arts participation?
   • How has your arts practice impacted on your personal capacity?
   • What is the difference between professional and community arts practice?

4. Cultural Industries
   • How does the need to address the economic impact of your projects affect what you do?
   • What are your views of the impact of arts policy on community cultural expression?
5. Vision
   • Are there funding challenges related to how you are able to perform your role?
   • Are you satisfied with the operational aspects of your position, or do you have an ideal of developing your sphere of planning and influence?
   • If so, how would you state this as a personal Vision Statement?
   • What are the barriers to realising this vision?

6. Policy
   • What are your views of the impact of current or past arts policy on community cultural expression?
1.2 Creative Practitioner Raw Transcripts

I. Jodie Raw Transcript

Jodie Chester, Visual Artist/Community Educator
Interviewed at Jodie’s home, Wellington Central West New South Wales
18 July, 2005

E: I’m talking to Jodie Chester and we’re at Wellington. The date is 18 July 2005 and we are at Jodie’s house.

E: How do you see what you do? Do you have a position here that identifies a position that you actually hold in the community here in Wellington as an indigenous person?

J: I see myself mainly as a concerned Koori person in a society that has completely changed over many generations and decades, but as a mother I have a responsibility to make a difference in the future of my children. Like I’m involved in a number of different things, and I wear many hats, so it’s hard to sort of say one particular role because I am involved in a number of different community based organizations. I’m a Director at the CDEP and I’m a Deputy Chairperson of Galandaban (check spelling) which is an ILC.

E: ILC is?

J: The Indigenous Land Corporation property out on Mudgee road. I’m a member of the Land Council as well and I’m involved with the Reconciliation group as well.

E: It takes up a lot of your time; you are doing lots of things?

J: Yeah, also too, I do a lot of voluntary work. Especially with the kids, because I see the kids as our future. Colonisation has created a lot of problems particularly pertaining to identity and a lot of that’s about reinforcing our cultural identity with our children to be proud of their culture and to continue practicing their culture, because it’s something that is not seen as often, and I suppose because I’ve worked in the Arts for a very long time, I’ve sort of had an influence from that area from a very young age in the arts. I played Clarinet as a young child, my brother was an artist – he was in Creative 84. I had all these influences around me as well as my family being very talented artistically as well. My mother can knit, sew, and cook whatever, with their hands, they’re very good-I don’t what happened to me because I can’t sew! Mum’s sister’s a dressmaker, everything in her house is hand made with all this embroidery and they’re just amazing, and it was part of their survival, growing up and how they were conditioned and I suppose I’ve grown up in a different era, because everything was made cheaply and you’d buy.
E: It wasn’t about having lots of money to go out and buy materials?

J: When I was a kid mum made my school uniform, she knitted my school jumpers, but I haven’t learnt those skills personally. I’m a shocking knitter; I end up with all these holes. Its things that have been around me and influenced like my mother, her sisters all the women in my family have influenced me a lot; I see them as very strong people. Here in Wellington, my mum’s in Sydney, she was born here, but she’s still in Sydney, here in Wellington my aunty lives here and I go around and visit her quite often. She’s like “give it to ‘em. Don’t you cop that off them!” She’s very sick now, she’s elderly now, but she’s still got that feisty bit in her; she’s been through hell, but they can’t beat her up I can tell ya. Aunty Joyce Williams, she’s 80 this year and that’s mum’s cousin – mum calls her aunty, she’s raised her kids, her grandkids and now she’s raising her great grandkids and she’s got 4 of them around there. She’s actively involved in this community; she’s got more go than half the people in this community. My mum and her sister, what I’ve said what they’ve been through, their stories, that’s where you get your strength from, like my mum’s sister was 5 years old and was hospitalised for going to the town school ‘cause she was black.

E: Beaten by?

J: Beaten by the teacher, because it was in the ‘50’s.

E: She wasn’t allowed to…?

J: She wasn’t allowed to… integration was starting to happen, my grandfather’s not Aboriginal, he married an Aboriginal woman and he was a Returned Soldier and he got rewarded for serving his country, but these people, their children were black and it was pretty sad but my aunty she dropped out of school at a young age because my grandmother had a stroke and my aunty stayed home and looked after Nan. She didn’t want to go to school ‘cause she was fearfull, and she had this fear of authority as a young person. Mum used to go to the parent and teacher interviews ….a couple of years ago she graduated with a Bachelor of Education and but she’s always been a strong woman it was about her finding it.

E: So how old is she now?

J: She’s in her late 50’s.

E: So she went back to school at this time

J: Late 40’s early 50’s and I think “power to my aunty!” It’s hard and it’s very hard for someone to go back to school at an older age, and she was doing her studies with her daughter... To me that’s a good, we always, she’s special, that’s the story in the family, that she was born special so it was about her finding that but all that trauma of being black as a young girl and all that she grew up with to find that it’s ok now, and she’s not going to take it.
E: So she has been empowered by recognising that she can actually go and do the things that she wants to do, nothing’s there to stop her.

J: I think too as an older woman, the older you get- if I remember my years growing up – you know when you grow up you think “If only I knew then what I know now” but I suppose that’s how we learn, and we’re still learning; that’s part of working and being working in your community too. I’ve had the opportunity and experiences as a younger person, like with my mother, she was actively involved in a number of …; Like I grew up in a hard family; mum left my father and with my stepfather today, he was involved in the Long March Building Bridges and I used to go to all those meetings and I learnt a lot and I met a lot of muso’s in that time ‘cause Building Bridges; there was Midnight Oil involved in it, Paul Kelly – that’s where Yothu Yindi got their first break.

E: This is in Sydney is it?

J: The Long March Committee was the Committee that they set up to do the big protest march that they had in 1988, the anti-bicentenary stuff. It was massive, and that was many years of work, because they couldn’t acquire government funding for it and we’d acquire, we fundraised, church groups helped, so a lot of it was self generated and a lot of non-Aboriginal people were very actively involved in that that’s what a lot of people don’t realize – Reconciliation Movement had started long before Reconciliation….

E: My memories of all of that was just the big celebrations and it were lots of television campaigns about our bicentennial but there was lack of the black perspective and I think that was happening like you were saying if you were involved in the underground and this was kind of happening at another level but wasn’t the public face of the bicentennial.

J: It didn’t get as much acknowledgement as it probably should have, it was pretty massive, and actually when you read the Media and that, they actually played down the figures, which was quite interesting, it was huge. We had our event at Hyde Park and they were all down at The Rocks. And there was also another protest group at Lady Macquarie Chair as well. That was Lisle Munroe, the Redfern Mob.

E: It didn’t get the media attention?

J: It got some.

E: But more as dissenters than people that were just party poopers. Is that how the media presented?

J: No, it wasn’t. They said that it was a protest, but they just didn’t give it much air time, they give it space, but very limited space, then they put their events on and they just show…it’s the best way to not educate the wider community, the best way to do that is by not to give it a focus. You know it was like Pauline Hanson was the dumbest woman I’d ever heard of and how much airplay has she been given in the media? Because she was saying what they wanted, and that’s how media play.
E: So certain people are getting a voice but their chosen by whoever.

J: Well the conglomerates run our media in our country so let’s just say

E: The people who don’t have that voice or don’t have the power of being able to speak are silenced in a way, they don’t go away?

J: No but I think though in 1988 there was some recognition and I actually find that being very proactive and productive and proactive because it wasn’t about money – it brought people together, a lot of things changed. I worked in Aboriginal Art Gallery for 9 years, it was Government funded, but I honestly believe that when we had no money, we were struggling and living off the smell of an oily rag, we had broken down computers, 1 typewriter between 4 of us and we ran by bits and pieces from Australia Council was pretty much our main funding source during that period, and they were the happiest days.

J: Because we were more united, because we had to be, because we had to work together as a community, and that is what Aboriginal culture is about, and I think that’s where we’ve lost a lot of our focus was because we’ve been enslaved in a lot of ways and ok they put out the, like the bait to reel you in “we’ll give you this and that” and put all this funding and made this stuff available, and yes “we want to do this for you” a lot of it is very tokenistic too. I think a lot of that sense of community has been dissolved because of it.

E: Because of funding it kind of has corrupted the ideal of working as a group?

J: It’s our culture too because they talk about democracy but in Aboriginal society, it’s not really a democratic society, it’s more of a communist or socialist society.

E: In the sense of like how?

J: The structures of it – it’s not about majority rules, it’s a consensus, it’s about finding a harmonious balance in a community to live together. The decisions are made by the elders because traditionally your rights as an Elder you would make the decisions on behalf of everybody had their roles, everybody had their responsibility but with colonialism all that’s been broken down, particularly with our men our men were locked up on Aboriginal reserves, institutionalised, not allowed to hunt (mobile rings – pause)

E: Just talking about the men. So just removing the men from their traditional society and putting them in missions was a disempowering process?

J: Yeah, they lost their whole self esteem, you know their sense of belonging because their role was that they were the hunters, the warriors. To lose that role whereas the women have been able to maintain our strength because we’re still the educators, we’re still the mothers and the educators in keeping the family together, the network you know, a woman’s got to be strong and all the challenges of the western system was put
to them and they have still maintained their strength and their dignity. Some of them old women how honorable… things are changing too like how the old Koorie women of my grandmother’s era were compared to the women of this era and it’s changed and it’s the breakdown of our culture in a lot of ways. It’s through change and society and having to adapt to it as well.

E: You are talking about being an aboriginal woman and that there has been a change from when your grandmothers time when women were different from how they are today because of this need to adapt to a change in society that’s globalization and

J: But that’s what frustrates me and that’s one of the reasons why I choose to work really hard to maintain our identity because I think it’s still important to maintain some of those old practices, particularly the value systems. The value system in western society is terrible. The hypocrisy of everything that’s going on around us in the world all around us today like the Americans and the influences that they’re having in our country and in our identity, interfering in other countries, they justify war, I don’t as an aboriginal person. In our culture, Aboriginal people are not a violent race of people, that’s something that’s been imposed on our people through past practices and injustices since colonization. Our warfare, you can make a comparison in research on Aboriginal warfare and you compare it to European warfare and its.

E: So people went to war here. There were reasons for war.

J: Yeah but few fatalities.

E: So it was about?

J: About energy and it was about spirituality, releasing bad energy and it was a spectator thing the women would be watching they would have their confrontation; there was minimal fatality because it was about dealing with and getting rid of the bad energy. It’s about healing, because bad thoughts bring bad energy and historically too what happened was when Europeans first got here, diseases happened and different things were going on which actually warfare increased during that period, because it created problems, and it’s still going on, divide and rule and conquer.

E: Do you see your role as building community? You understand that there is this division that happens and it’s like setting one person against the other for whatever reason but you see yourself as actually pulling things together that is community, bringing people in?

J: Yeah, I do a lot more work with the kids.

E: Your kids?

J: No, other kids too.

J: Other kids as well in the community. With me and Cedric, my husband is a practitioner as well. He’s an aboriginal dancer and musician and storyteller and we get
kids together and we take them and we performed at the Wellington show this year for the first time ever. We got them together and just did some workshops, we do in our own time, it’s not about money.

E: How do the workshops run? What do you do, do you just set up a…?

J: People we know who have got kids who are interested. For me, I work with people I know I can get along with and work with, because we’re all different and, like some of the Koori families are so completely lost, I just have problems with, ‘cause it’s about power sometimes and I just see the influences of western culture and if I’m going to put my time in and do love jobs, I’m doing love jobs because I’m going to enjoy it, ‘cause there’s family differences in Wellington here. Well when I moved up here there was a big dispute over Native Title claim, and I took a stand and I don’t care, I’m the type of person, I don’t sit on the fence, and I don’t like people that sit on the fence, because people know where I stand, because I’m an honest person, and it’s about being true to myself. As well as working in the Arts for 9 years in an art gallery.

E: This is in Sydney?

J: Yep, I worked at the Boomalili Aboriginal Arts Cooperative, seeing the lack of representation, seeing the amount of ignorance towards Aboriginal culture has probably been, I think it goes back to my childhood, I still remember having a punch up with this girl, going to school, they used to call us black abo’s on the one hand and they’d say “ah, you’re not really an Abo” that’s how they used to talk to us “you’re not really an abo ‘cause you don’t eat witchetty grubs” and then they’d throw rocks at my grandmother over the back fence, that’s one of the reasons I used to flog this girl going to school “throw rocks at my grandmother! Whack, whack, whack” (laughs). But you know these were the things that you would grow up with, because people would say – there’s your blatant racism when you’re called an “abo” or a “spear chucker” like that’s the things we grew up with, but there’s the – I find that racism easier to deal with.

E: Because it’s out there and you can see it.

J: The racism, the underlying racism that’s silent.

E: You’re not being told what people actually…?

J: But you can feel it and I think too, I think Australia really is a racist country, but there’s a denial about things in Australian history, they still deny the real history of Australian history, and to deny that there’s no racism when we see this, well for me as an Aboriginal person, I thought that the campaign behind the One Nation Party was used as a tool and it’s being fear of Native Title Legislation was pretty much the key influence and like we all know that Robert Tickner had his office blown up and all those sorts of things that happened, and it’s ironic, I lived in his electorate, it was actually pretty sad because it was a Labour seat for all them years and all of a sudden, ‘cause of development, ‘cause in that Southern area all the Crown land and that they must build all
these houses everywhere, all through there, up on the other side of the National Park, Lucas Heights.

E: It’s a defensive or reactive move to build up?

J: It’s capitalism versus…like the rights of people in social issues are just sort of been on a back seat for many, many years and it was only a short term period that they were acknowledged. I believe anyway but like and the lack of respect to do with it all, in the way that it had built up as an Aboriginal person, it was really sad because you actually saw the amount of ignorance there is in society and that too I suppose has been something that you know wanting to teach people about Aboriginal culture, you know “this is who we are” that’s something that’s important to me as well, ‘cause the stuff that happened with the Hindmarsh Bridge, as an Aboriginal woman and understanding how Aboriginal stories that are passed down.

E: That hit the big time in terms of the publicity that it got and I think it’s still simmering there underneath.

J: Well, yeah because of the lack of respect about what actually happened. The actual impact that had, because people think “oh, it’s a long, long, long away, but it’s impacted right across here. It’s also to do with culture and the stories and that’s to do with that whole thing of colonisation, like what I was talking about earlier about. See knowledge is power in Aboriginal culture and knowledge is power in the western system too. Not everybody has that knowledge and some people were institutionalised and during that Hindmarsh affair how they had other Aboriginal people go and speak against those women, and those women they would have been handed down that information from many generations. I’m very fortunate because I’ve been given information that has been knowledge for many generations, I don’t know everything but I’ve been given bits.

E: From your own mother who was given by her mother, so that’s the knowledge that’s been passed down to you which you will pass on to your children.

J: Eventually. But Aunty Joycey Williams knows a lot and she’s passed down information as well and she knew a lot more than my mother did actually, because she was the first daughter, like she was the woman with the knowledge, so she was the one who got it on the next generation, cause her mother was the first daughter.

E: Oh right. So is it from first daughter to first daughter?

J: No, she’s was chosen.

E: By?

J: By the person.

E: Who has the knowledge and that person chooses who she hands it down to?
J: Has to be chosen by the right person because my mum’s sister was the one that was chosen over my mum.

E: There is no acrimony over it or resentment. It’s just understanding that that’s our culture works.

J: My aunty was special from birth, it was always known and it’s something that the women all know and they talk about it.

E: Then there was no problems with this then?

J: No because she was special, so when she was born it was always said that once she gets older she’s the special one, she was chosen from birth, and people don’t understand that, it’s very hard to.

E: So it’s like a spiritual thing? It’s not something that you say well…

J: Well a woman knows I suppose…see my great grandma was a midwife and she delivered many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal babies around here, then it was Aunty Joyce’s mother that was mid-wifing, then it all stopped they had to go into the hospitals, and they used to make them have them out on the back verandah away from everybody else. Ah, they were very cruel, you should hear the stories, they make you cry. You know Hermitage Hill here? They advertise it on Catriona Roundtree, what is it? (tv show). Well that was the old hospital and the back section of it was where the Aboriginal women had to have their babies. My mother was born there.

E: It’s like against private practice. The community would have chosen…

J: So my mum’s eldest brother was delivered by my great grandmother, not in a hospital, and the eldest sisters I think was born, like all the older ones were delivered. I think the last child delivered before they were made to go to the hospital, was Aunty Joyce’s eldest daughter, and her other 2 children were born in hospitals, but her eldest daughter was born in a Chinese Laundromat down in ….Street. All that sort of stuff about being who you are is…I think who I am today is to do with how I’ve been conditioned, the influences that are around me, but it’s also how I’ve been taught things and how I’ve been taught to see things and things are not always as they seem, we all know that. It’s about actually being able to connect those things, because they’re not as they seem and a lot of it stems from your spirituality and your intuition and your cultural teaching.

E: So it’s a personal journey but what your saying here is that it is about the people that you choose to be with and maybe they choose you too. So you are on a journey with other people who

J: ‘cause we’re all connected.

E: That they are the elders I suppose and that they pass down information that you know and…
J: That’s the thing in today’s society that has changed too. When I talk about the different eras and it’s something that I see in society, I don’t see it… I think that it’s something that Western society has a lot to answer for because it’s the sense of even communities as a whole, in the wider community; it’s just not an Aboriginal thing. Like I remember when I was living in Sydney and there was an old woman they found passed away down at Annandale and she’d been dead for 2 years and no-one ever knew, none of the neighbours and that disheartens you to think, look at the kind of world… and like when I lived at Menai, I didn’t really know my neighbours, they didn’t really you know, we’d just say hello, we were just the Aboriginal family that lived over the road, but we’re very isolated and many years ago our people how they survived on the missions, they all cared and looked after each other and they still had a sense of tribal practices.

E: So even though that disposition happened it was still…

J: They maintained their identity through their tribal practices of sharing.

E: And it happened on the missions and reserves.

J: That’s where my family come from, they were all on the Black’s Camp Nanamah.

E: Nanamah is here?

J: The Aboriginal reserve in Wellington.

E: Which is no longer?

J: No, it’s still here.

E: Oh, okay, people still live out there. Is it still a reserve?

J: Yeah.

E: Kind of or people have got homes there?

J: It’s still a reserve although not the same of what it used to be.

E: They wouldn’t have the regulised kind of Mission Inspector and all that kind of thing?

J: Yeah, It’s not just that but I think to with see my family, I didn’t know my great great grandmother, but she lived out there, she was the one who was a midwife, but she was a very strong woman and had a hell of a lot to say, and had a lot of influence out there on the Mission.

E: She was a recognised elder there and kept practices alive with the younger ones?
J: Yeah, she used to take my mum and all that out fishing and tell them all these stories and tell them about country and that’s something that not many people know, is the stories to country here (Wellington) it’s a very special place, it’s a very special place. This is probably an area that’s not sort of like, it’s a shared country, it was for special business.

E: So other people would come here to do business?

J: Different Wiradjuri clans would come here for certain business practices.

E: It was always Wiradjuri people going back from around Orange way?

J: It’s also a major burial here.

E: Is that being maintained? Is it a sacred place or has it been desecrated and people just don’t know.

J: We know it’s there, we’ve talked about it, they’ve dug up bones there, but the racism in Wellington is; it’s actually quite interesting because for me growing up in the City, my husband grew up in the city and moved back to mum’s country, it was like taking a step back into the 1950’s, it really was, and I worked in the Aboriginal Art gallery and a lot of the Aboriginal Art exhibitions, if you saw the ‘Moving ‘Round’ one (Elizabeth – yes), there was a bit of confrontation within that and that’s not the first time that that’s happened.

E: I might just talk about Movin’ ‘Round exhibition in Orange Jodie curated, what was your role, what did you actually do?

J: I was the guest Curator and I made contact with, mostly I already had contacts but I had spoke with Hannah Semler from Arts OutWest as well, she was great, she was such a wonderful support person and as a non-Aboriginal person I think she’s doing a wonderful job. She’s got a big job ahead of her and unfortunately I think she has a vast area for one person to deal with and I have a big serious problem with that because before, when I lived in the City before I moved down here, I actually wrote a paper at Uni about development of Aboriginal Art and Culture in NSW and it was to do with the recognition of Aboriginal cultural identity and that was to do with actually the recognition of Aboriginal cultural existence in NSW, pretty much it’s to do with the stereotypical idealisms of “you’re not really Aboriginal, you’re only a part Aborigine” all that sort of stuff about the whole question of your identity, and yet you’re still called “black” you know “ya blackfella” but then on the other hand they put all these other…it was about everybody else controlling… and you know who you are and I’m probably one of many hundreds of thousands of Aboriginals who feel the same way because a lot of Aboriginal people I know and that I’ve worked with do feel the same way. See working in Aboriginal Art, it’s very united, all the industries because you have to be to maintain your strength, because we’re a minority in our own country. We did a lot of work…we were working together to get a cultural centre up and running, there was Bangarra, Boomalli...
E: Now this is back in Sydney?

J: Back in Sydney, Black Books, us and Blackfella Films and the old NIA ...

E: This is the 1980’s again?
J: The 1990’s which came out of the ‘80’s and the ‘90’s were a new era and we were trying to get a cultural centre up and happening, that was something that we were working on then and I had a lot of contacts, so a lot of this stuff we were working on was to actually having it recognised; and one of the issues being to was, when we were at Boomalli…see this is where it’s hard to explain, because this is where I’m coming from as to why I’m…

E: We’ve come to this linear thing and you’re saying everything is connected because this was connected to that because of that and it’s not sequential…

J: Because when I go back to Boomalli when we were fighting for that same thing – we tried to set up a regional area in membership in Boomalli because we only had Sydney based artists, but how could we do that if we were a cooperative and you had to do voluntary hours; so we set up a special membership criteria where we actually – because out of the NSW Aboriginal Artists conference in 1993 that they had at the Nanajerri Reserve at Doonside, there was this need for…cause a lot of Aboriginal people live in remote communities. Let’s go to Wilcannia, let’s go to Bourke, let’s go to Brewarrina, let’s go to Wellington, 48% Aboriginal kids at the public school, you know, Dubbo and some of these little towns that are nearly 100% Aboriginal. This is the thing that we’re talking about, and yet they’re not recognised or acknowledged, but we have a lot of and they don’t have resources, and we’ve got a society changing, but these communities because of the lack of recognition of cultural identity, our kids are getting completely lost and wayward, so that is why it was a massive need, a massive need and it was identified, we were going to set up at the Brewarrina cultural centre, it never happened.

E: You were going to set up…

J: We were going to set up an Aboriginal Liaison officer at Brewarrina so it would be central

E: To the region outside Sydney?

J: Yeah because how many regional galleries, and not all those galleries, like over the mountains, there’s a lot of Aboriginal people in the Western NSW regions, but they’re not getting service provisions. There are limited regional galleries, some of those regional galleries aren’t working with the Aboriginal communities, so the development of Aboriginal art and culture is limited, so we’re not getting access, so they’re being denied the forum. They’re being denied so this is the stuff where I’m coming from about getting the acknowledgement, so when I started working on the show it was about okay

E: This is the show here now?
J: Here now in Orange so I’ve come back around. So where we’ve come from there, we’ve got this Exhibition that has, I didn’t want dots, because we have this mass market of kitsch art because of the influences of the western culture – this is what’s Aboriginal paintings, this is what we did.
E: Is dot painting and it is a stereotype?

J: It was taught in the schools by non-Aboriginal people, it’s taught in the juvenile justice centers by non-Aboriginal people. This is what non-Aboriginal culture has imposed on our people, the continual denial of our cultural existence.

E: As you express it? Not as it’s interpreted by others that say that’s aboriginal.

J: Yes. It’s about the continual dictatorship and our people can fall victims to that kitsch mass production.

E: They’re responding to it because they are saying well that’s where the market is and I’ll do it because I’ve got a market and can sell it.

J: While we at Bromali that’s what we fought against. Very few exhibitions were dot paintings. A lot of it was very political, but that was important too because that in itself is an expression of people seeing it and seeing how it is and how Aboriginal feel as well. So however you want to express your culture and tell your story is important as well.

E: Which is a choice you have not how it’s dictated?

J: Yep and being censored. Why should we be censored? So when I was asked to curate the exhibition (Moving ‘round) I thought I’m not going to have dots in this show, I really want to steer away from that, that’s not where I am, or what I want to achieve as an Aboriginal Curator or an Arts Practitioner, I see that role as being an Educator.

E: So you really do see your role as educating?

J: Breaking down the barriers and the ignorance and the misconceptions.

E: But it’s also in the indigenous community. It’s kind of representing a face that it authentic to the wider community but it’s something that’s also happening within the aboriginal communities that just have a lot of divisions and…

J: It is too, I see that as important. Look, you have a young Koori kid who comes in, when I was in Sydney a young fella come in and he’s got this Aboriginal painting and he’d done all these dots and he’s called it Bush Tucker Dreaming – the kid’s never eaten bush tucker in his life, McDonald’s yeah, but we are a living culture and that I had concerns with, and then he says “I want a thousand dollars” because he thinks he’s done this…because of the commercialisation and I call it the bastardisation of our culture because that’s what it is, because dot paintings became popularised in the ‘70’s and bark paintings became popularised in the 1920’s and the missionaries introduced blackfellas
to doing the bark paintings. Aboriginal people painted bark paintings and hung them in their humpies? You know…;

E: So art isn’t the way that it is put in frames or boundaries by white culture this is what you’re saying art is?

J: You go into a museum and you see Aboriginal culture behind a glass box like it’s untouchable when it’s like, you know, we’re a sharing…our culture’s about sharing and here we are; you go into a museum, as an Aboriginal person that’s affronting, it’s good to see that it’s protected, but it’s not culturally appropriate how it’s presented in a lot of ways.

E: So for you being culturally represented is that is it interactive?

J: Yeah, hands on, a lot of our teaching is hands on and interactive and I have major, major problems with the way things falsely perceive, it gives people a false perception of our culture in that whole thing, so it’s hard to explain or to teach a non-Aboriginal person about how our cultural practices were and how they are. Like I’m still an Aboriginal person today, I live in a house and that’s how they are…like how I am here today, it’s not by choice, it’s because that’s what society has imposed on our people, so that’s where we have all these changes and Aboriginal people, like I’m an Aboriginal person myself, this is my problem – I struggle with trying to maintain my identity as an Aboriginal person and as well practice because I hate hypocrisy so I try very hard to maintain, to practice what I preach, and maintain my identity through practicing our culture as best I can in this world that we live in, but it’s about teaching the wider community about that and even in our own people, and all Aboriginal people, not all of them has been as fortunate as me, they have been institutionalised and they have sadly lost a lot of our people’s ways and it’s about trying to bring that balance and I have big problems with the so-called democracy that they impose on our people, because that just doesn’t work in Aboriginal communities – you just see the complexities of it; and you have, let’s just use the Land Council system for an example.

J: You’ll have all these people that are making decisions on somebody else’s country – that’s not culturally appropriate.

E: So there’s like a misunderstanding from within indigenous communities and different groups?

J: Democracy – you can all have a vote.

E: But majority rules are what they are saying so they are imposing the democratic ideal on something that is not really appropriate…

J: You can have 95% of those people in that room that don’t come from country that’s voted for it, the other 5% who are from that country who oppose it, but they’ve got no rights in their own country.
E: So they are using an ideal that is imposed?
J: We see the continuity of white man’s law creating forms of genocide in all different ways, you know they say here’s the Native Title legislation and here’s a Land Rights Act and here’s the Aboriginal Associations Act all of them of which none of them are culturally appropriate.

E: Who actually came up with the acts, like is it being designed by Aboriginal people, where do the acts actually come from?
J: You always have the white experts don’t you know that because we’re the dumb blackfellas.

E: So the acts are there to kind of protect you, protect the indigenous people?
J: I don’t know about protecting us.

E: That’s the reasoning behind that.

J: There’s the dissolution of the ATSIC Act which took away the so-called Democracy and we’re back to the Mission management stage. It’s almost been – you’re damned if you do, and you’re damned if you don’t in a lot of ways because it’s a really complex system. I just don’t like the way the system is completely.

E: But you have a different vision okay. Do you have a clear idea of what that vision is or is it something more like this thing happens and it’s not like that you’re reacting but your having to work out how to deal with what you see so you think lets do this and for instance you had the Wellington Show first time ever you had a cultural presentation. J: I wasn’t impressed of the presentation of where we were and the lack of, not our lack of organisation, but theirs (Show Society), it was at the back and it was in front of a bar.
E: So you are working within constraints but you’re still having to see…

J: But you see, you pass that – not many people saw it, the ones who saw it as an opportunity, at the end of the day it’s what the kids got out of it.

E: So as much as there are the problems and the hurdles you do see that it is worthwhile what you do do?

J: Yes because at the end of the day it I see a little kid smile and laugh – we had about 15 koori kids dancing and they were happy and they have been nagging me, when are they going to dance again – to me that in itself is something that is worthwhile doing because to make any child happy is a good thing, because they’re our future and if you make a child feel good and proud of their identity and they feel good about that and proud about who they are then that is a major accomplishment ’cause that’s what they need to do, because many generations were not made proud of who they were and that is one of the reasons why the system has failed our people continually because of their lack of self esteem and because of the racism that is in this country.
E: So it is disempowering that the kids are bought up in this feeling shamed of who they are and you can’t really just talk about your aboriginality because you can’t speak with black pride and people say great your aboriginal, isn’t that fantastic.

J: And not being a token Aboriginal, it’s about acceptance of being different. It’s a very sad world because I don’t see it as an issue for Aboriginal people, I see it as people from other ethnic backgrounds too because – I grew up in a multicultural with heaps.

E: This is in Sydney.

J: Yeah, I lived near Liverpool and we had about 400 Vietnamese kids who used to come from the Hostels in their buses and get dropped off to our school everyday and like some of them couldn’t speak English and some could speak English and getting to know some of those kids, it was great because I learnt stuff from them, like they had a different life to us, they had a different culture to us, but they didn’t have any choices of what they were yet they weren’t accepted either. We had racial warfare at our school.

E: This is between the Vietnamese…

J: and Australian kids.

E: So when you say Australian kids you mean kids that come from?

J: Skippies.

E: From Anglo Celtic? Not the ones that come from ethnic backgrounds?

J: Some of them did but they didn’t acknowledge it because they saw themselves as ‘Aussies’

E: So they wanted to be mainstream, they wanted to be

J: It’s that whole racist shit that we deal with every day; and yet some of those kids we knew they had Italian, Maltese, and Czechoslovakian, Polish backgrounds.

E: But they denied that of their background?

J: They were ‘Aussies’. They were born in the country.

E: Even though their parents may have been Czechoslovakian or Italian or Greek or whatever they weren’t saying

J: But the Anglo-Saxons would call them wogs too. It was all that racism stuff, seeing that, for me I see that as a great experience, it was the ‘70’s and you know, oh, Australian culture, how racist was it (laughs) like it was just blatant ‘eh, ya wog!’
E: Whereas we’ve got this politically correct ‘ism that has come in where you don’t say it but you might think it.

J: But that’s worse. I’d rather someone say to me ‘you’re an abo’ actually they used to say ‘you don’t look aboriginal, you look more Italian’ (laughs) ‘But I’m not Italian!, ‘but you look it’ (laughs).

E: Have we moved on? That’s what it was like then in the 70’s?

J: No.

E: It’s just changed its face has it? It’s the same...?

J: It’s a different world too because then we still had communities in one sense and now we have today a little bit more acceptance of people who come from ethnic backgrounds, like Italian.

E: They’ve moved up a few grades on the ladder

J: Yes, they have…they’re more acceptance today, but we’ve lost our sense of community because of all the interracial marriages, you know so many people you know who are Italian on one line, because they’ve been raised...there’s one key issue that’s missing there is your classes, different classes in different areas.

E: By class do you mean economically?

J: You’ve got your poor family groups, whereas see where I grew up it was poor, working class, I grew up in Government housing, so it was all government housing, when I grew up, the area was a trial run for the government, and they did this colour coding system, and they put an Aborigine family there, ‘cause remember when you had all the English migrants as well, so our next door neighbours were English migrants, it was funny because they started a petition about my grandmother, and my mum told them to fuck off back to England with their 10 pound, they could stick it up their arse – well they were nasty to my grandmother.

E: Was your grandmother saying anything or she just was there?

J: My grandmother was a quiet woman and kept to herself and never hurt no-one.

E: So it was just her being black.

J: And here they were renting out housing commissions saying that we’d bring the value down in their home, when they weren’t even home owners, when they came out on a 10 pound ticket, they were just racist, and my mother wasn’t going to tolerate them being racist; like my mother probably saw a lot more than what I did ‘cause the white Australia policy was still around when she was born, you know so we’ve got those different eras too you know; and my mum she was in Redfern and it was very
multicultural when my mum lived in Redfern, my mum would tell you, there was a lot of Maltese families and Italian families and Greek families, and my mum was friends with some of them.

E: Did they all move out?

J: No, there’s still a lot of those families there, you go and have a look around Surry Hills, you’ve still got a lot of the Lebanese food shops and you’re going to get Turkish pizzas and they’re all still there. The Aboriginal people in the ‘50’s actually all lived in Alexandria at that stage. You had the big green bans in the ‘70’s and then they handed over that land and give them a 99 year lease in Redfern, that’s what happened, and it wasn’t until then that they all lived there, so we had these fellas, it’s quite interesting ‘cause there’s a whole thing that stems with identity where you’re from, so when you say, people say ‘where are you from?’ like for me growing up ’I would say, I’m a Wiradjuri woman but I grew up in Sydney; and I never forget having a row with one fella, he reckons I’m from Redfern, like he was raised in Redfern, yeah he was younger than me, but he wasn’t from Redfern, he was a Wiradjuri man.

E: Did he know that or...?

J: He didn’t know, because they’ve lost their sense of identity, of who they are because of...you know, it’s part of your parents responsibility and teaching, and because of the breakdowns of cultural institutions and all the rest of it, as well we have the social impacts on our families, you know, like something’s happened in families, racism or something really bad or tragic happened and this person’s got completely lost and fell off the track and you know...they’ve lost their sense of themselves, because of their own pain and suffering – some of ‘em are victims and some of ‘em are survivors, and the ones who become victims are the ones that have generation on generation of victims and unfortunately that’s what we see a lot of today. People only want to show you the bloody victim side and I’m not a victim, I’m a survivor and that’s why I see that as being part of being an educator you know, get over it, you know, you fall off your bike, you get back on it and you can ride your bike again, keep moving forward, like Aboriginal culture, our cultural existence is not going to exist if we let all those barriers get in our way; okay there is a barrier, like as we were talking earlier I see those barriers, but how am I going to get around those barriers – I mightn’t have the answer right now, but I will sit back and I will weigh that up, but there must be a way that we can do this.

E: When you see that barrier do you talk to Cedric and say ‘this is happening, what are we going to do’?

J: Oh yeah, Cedric and I talk about it a lot.

E: I suppose I’m asking how do you come to working out how to get over those barriers that prove to be too big to some people where they just say ‘this is just too hard and I am just going to go away’ and maybe continue the victim thing.  
J: It’s funny ’cause I actually talk to my mother a lot still and I talk to my stepfather a lot; ‘cause you’ve got your political barriers as well because being Aboriginal is
political, anything to do with politics ‘cause I’m involved with community based organisations, any of the problems involved in that I always talk to my stepfather ‘cause he’s been a big ball player, you know he was at Tranby College for many, many years.

E: Is he Wiradjuri as well?

J: No, Djerinja South Coast. He’s a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful person, like special as in…I seen him in a meeting in a room full of rowdy, angry black people and he can calm them down.

E: He’s got a special energy?

J: He talks to people but he doesn’t talk at people, he doesn’t talk down to people, he talks with people, and he makes them feel like they’ve got…he empowers them, you know in a lot of ways, like Lyle Monroe, remember when I said about the Long March in 1988 well that was quite interesting because Lyle Monroe would come in and go ‘rraaa, rrraa’ ‘cause he’s about power and gotta control everything; he was involved in the Tent Embassy like Lyle’s… Lyle and he said ‘we’re going to have our own march, and we’re gonna do…’ and Cookie went ‘That’s a good idea’ and he said ‘you know we’ll support you, if that’s what you want to do’ and Lyle thought he was going to cause this you know…and instead he just went ‘oh, yeah okay’ and like he walked out peaceful. Like he (stepfather) is the best peacemaker I have ever seen. You go to Land Council meetings, he was the best Chairperson because it was the way that he…it’s his rapport with people, he’s got great people skills and he was involved in the Trade Union movement, you wouldn’t believe he was with the BLF, and he survived all that period and yet you’d see his personality and you hear all these rumours about what the BLF was supposed to be

E: This is the Jack Mundy’s era

J: Jack Mundy’s one of his best mates. Cookie was involved in the Green Ban. That’s how he was good friends with Meredith Bergman and all them, like she’s the president of the House of Representatives, first female speaker of the House, and they’re all of his mates ‘cause he was involved in those Green Bans.

E: So was Cookie bought up in the tribal aboriginal kind of sense

J: His father is non-Aboriginal and his mother is

E: So is it a strong presence in his opinion

J: He’s very strong about his… he was involved in Black Theatre too.
E: So it’s an identity thing for him which he may have got from his mother but maybe not sure. He’s very quiet about his…he’s not a real chatty person, but you can sit down and talk to him about anything. He is a doer.
J: But when he does talk he’s always got a strength and an energy about him. He’s a very sick man with emphysema, today that’s why people go ‘Kevin Cook, yeah I remember him’ like they talk about him like he’s not here anymore and it gets really hurtful for me hearing that ‘cause I hold him...like my mum and dad have been estranged for many years, my mother’s been with him so long and I call him dad, he’s like my father. He’s done more for me than my real father has anyway, really like in that sense; like my mum got with him when I was a teenager.

E: He’s been the father figure in your life.

J: So if I want to talk to someone I talk to him – it depends what it’s about, if it’s about my kids or lady’s stuff I talk to mum, but anything else, problems to do with my husband, I don’t necessarily talk to mum, I talk to him about it.

E: So you’ve got somebody who is a role model who knows how to smooth the waters and there’s an obstacle that comes ahead and you think how am I going to deal with this so he’d be the person that has got all this background and

J: Yeah, I talk through things, like you’ve got to talk through things, think through things, ‘cause I talk to different people and all the people I talk to, talk to different people, so we sort of have this connection, it’s really a circle – it’s this big circle, like we all connect up.

E: But it’s not something like you have actively created, it’s just that this person speaks to this person and it’s just created itself almost?

J: And it still is a continual circle and that is why the exhibition got called Movin’ ‘round because the circle is always still there, culturally and everything is, because we’re all somehow, somewhere we’re connected, we’re related.

E: But it’s not deliberate it’s more

J: No, it’s the cycle of life, it’s just something that western culture can’t understand. You know people say that the world is so small, the world is bloody small, it’s just really weird, like your (my) husband somehow ties in somewhere along the line with my husband’s family genealogy; and then when we sit and we talk about all these...like even Ely, his family tree ties up with my family circle, Georgina’s ties in my circle and we just keep going on, going and going, and it just all ties up somewhere, somehow, and there’s a connection, and the land is connected, the stories are connected, everything is connected and that is why, it’s so hard for non-Aboriginal people because they’ve always gotta break things down and put ‘em in their little boxes and that’s something that has really shitted me, and that’s why in terms of being an art practitioner I want to break down them barriers.

E: So it’s breaking down the boxes and opening circles.

J: Yes.
E: So the western thing is we’re connected because legalistically probably because I work in this job and therefore I am connected to this person because I work with them so there are artificial boundaries or things that connect those people together which maybe economically based perhaps.

J: As cliché as it sounds, the Lion King’s song The Circle of Life (laughs) and isn’t it great music, I love the music, it’s great because it’s sort of this universal language there which everyone relates to in music.

E: That is the thing about this study is the music side and I know you see yourself more as a culture person which is specifically to do with art, now

J: When you say art, when I was talking about earlier about that’s where I go back to, how we were altogether and united and it’s also to do with – this is a western thing – they deliberately boxed us all off to make us weaker in numbers I reckon, but culturally, health, housing, education, and our culture, like when you say Art, Music, Dance it’s part of our culture, so why is it getting boxed off into all these different things, so there we have that component so when the exhibition was opened in Orange, there was certainly dance and song and music, because it’s part of our culture, it’s all one, it’s not these boundaries, and the boundaries are there because they’re put there and they shouldn’t be there because that’s why, it’s a western thing, that’s why when the barriers get put up, in a cultural system.

E: So are the barriers like keeping people out like you don’t really belong to this group so where we have an identity as a group as in the western concept this is us and that’s them and therefore this is the line which you do not cross because that’s the

J: That’s the funny thing because Aboriginal culture is about sharing and you know there was that thing where you go back to the museum and they put everything behind a glass box and it’s like that’s not who we are. How many non-Aboriginal people go to the North Territory and the old fellas put them through lore up there and give them a skin name…because it’s about sharing.

E: So it is inclusive this. It’s not saying this is our culture and we don’t see you as being

J: As long as a non-Aboriginal person doesn’t come in and dictate, because that’s a western thing, that power thing, whereas we already had our structures in place. That’s the difference of it, it’s not about power, your power in Aboriginal culture is based on knowledge, you’ve got a lot of people who think they know it all but you know, you let them go, they’re right they’ll get caught up with (laughs) the truth will come out – you know that whole thing of justice prevails, the truth does come out.

E: Do you see that as an aboriginal thing that there is like a hopeful conclusion, a resolution there are factions and problems and issues?
J: I don’t try to control everything ‘cause you can’t control everything because of the world that we live in, but what I do have control over is myself and my own actions and what is going on over here, and over here, and over here, they are a barrier in a lot of ways, but it’s also about my integrity. There’s certain things I’ve got to…they’re not going to be a part of my circle in that sense.

E: So you choose to say oh well okay you’re doing that, I don’t agree so perhaps I’ll just go off and do this and it’s more positive for you to do something that you think

J: It’s good for the spirit, who wants to be caught up with this whole spiritual struggle, something that you don’t believe in, it’s just not right, it’s not right for…you know you’ve got to go with the spirit, the spirit says ‘don’t do it’ don’t do it, it’s not good for me, because at the end of the day, if I’m sick spiritually, and I have been sick before, spiritually, that impacts on what kind of a mother am I, how I am with my children.

E: So it’s about the choosing the people that you do have your circle in a sense that if you have certain influences coming in that you think no, this is not right

J: Most of your family you do get along with, there’ll be the…uncle so & so, he’s a bit of a arsehole when he’s drunk, don’t go and have a beer with him, you know things like that, so you do to a certain degree have that space – it’s like me father-in-law more to it, but you know, he’s okay he’s just him, just different to me, and that’s fine, but the thing is that, like me and my husband live away, like I’ve got family here and he hasn’t but we go and visit his family and all the rest of it and maintain that contact, but he lost his mother so that’s a bigger thing so, I don’t know, it’s very hard to sort of explain any of that, because in one sense we live in a house as a family, but culturally we wouldn’t have lived like this and we don’t have that extended whole range that we would have…but my mum when she was a young girl, she had, her aunty was next door, her cousins lived on the other side, and over the road was her cousin and his family and then there was aunty so & so, like they all lived together, and lived in each other’s pockets at homes. Actually I’ll give you a good… actually the best Aboriginal community I walked in to was Forster. We went up there, my husband’s friends with one of the family’s and we stayed with them they gave us their room and they slept in with their kids and we slept in their room, they had 2 boys, and I was sitting there on the lounge and in walks someone and they go straight to the fridge and they took something out and they went home and they went down the street, they left the front door open, and they run out of milk and they went next door and got some milk from next door. When me and Cedric left there, like this was before we had kids, I said ‘you know what, that is the most beautiful community I’ve ever been in. They all sat and had a drink together, they all went and had a drink, but they took their fishing lines down, we went fishing together, but it was the way they were as a community and they were nearly all related, but what I really loved was the sense that your house was their house, that they all shared, and it was like, this was how our people lived in the old days and we don’t live like this anymore.
J: And that gives you a sense of sadness that we don’t have the value systems that were so important to our people, you can’t even survive like that, and I reckon it’s deliberate the system, to weaken us.

E: To keep people separated and weaken individual to say this is about mine and I’m not really you know I’m not going to share and it’s sense of tribal

J: And it’s just a real western and that’s sad because we are in a lot of ways…like you try really hard to maintain your identity but it’s really hard in the other sense, with all the other values, you try really hard, but you know if we were to survive that way, you couldn’t survive like that, because that’s the way they’ve made society, because I believe it’s getting harder and harder; they’ve put GST on….like when I was working in, you go in the Land Council there going into people’s homes, you saw poverty, and poverty’s gotten worse, and that was only last year I was going into Aboriginal homes, that was Social Housing and seeing poverty the way it was, like I was working, and like I’m not affluent, and I can tell you, I was

E: It’s like a scale, it’s relative

J: They say that we’ve got 3 classes but in actual fact we’ve have 4, where there are 4 class systems in Australia; yes there is the working class, but there’s a class below them.

E: And they are the silenced ones.

J: It’s actually been talked about for a long time; when I did, we did social issues as one of our subjects.

E: Now this is the uni course you did which was?

J: I did Community Organisations at UTS.

E: You got the degree?

J: It’s the diploma which should be a Bachelor, because the year I graduated everyone I graduated with at the end of that year, ‘cause I did it weird; I was working full time at Boomalli’s and doing uni, and doing block release, and at the time I was acting up.

E: This was before Cedric and the children?

J: No, I was married and had Janarra, it was in the ‘90’s; yeah I graduated…I deferred one of my subjects, and I finished it and I graduated in April rather than at the end of the year.

E: When you say acting up what do you mean?

J: I was acting up, that is I was the Administrator at the Boomalli's and then I was the General Manager, so I was running the whole of the organisation as well as doing Uni,
so it was very hard writing funding submissions for the organisation, the funding submissions to the Australia Council, Ministry for the Arts and ATSIC as well as I was doing the acquittals.

E: So with the funding submissions you actually did get funding to continue the service that you were running. That’s pretty amazing, there’s not many people that can probably do that as well as a family and children. Makes you wonder how you did it?

J: Don’t think I could it today; I look back and I think, yeah but top this, I was a single mother really, ‘cause Cedric was on the road, performing

E: With his dance?

J: He was going on tour after tour.

E: Was he part of Bangarra?

J: They were Batabah Aboriginal dance troupe.

E: That was pre-Bangarra all the people perform.

J: Cedric was around before Bangarra.

E: Then Bangarra came out of these groups?

J: No, they come out of NAISDA. Cedric didn’t come out of the school, Cedric grew up in Newcastle and they had culture camps and they used to go around to different communities and Elders used to teach them dancing and stuff and the Dangari Dancers who were the first ones to go over to the Pacific Arts Festival and that, like a lot of those boys, Cedric’s would go on them when he was young, ‘cause they used to go on those camps when they were kids and when old Bobby Campbell and them were still around teaching…like they were old school.

E: That’s where Cedric learnt his dancing?

J: Yeah, dance but he met Wandjakmarika as a young boy and wanted to play the didge like him.

E: Okay, so he learnt.

J: Cedric taught himself (how to play the didge) and that was who inspired him to learn and he’s still now amazing.

E: So he’s still continuing to teach children here in Wellington.

J: Yep.
E: Is it a proper class that he runs on a regular basis?

J: Nah

E: But he goes around and like let’s have a practice?

J: We have complexities with everything to do with it because …well the system’s made harder, like before you did Community Work, everything has lost it’s full purpose of community because of the way we’re going, public liability and all the rest of the crap that’s supposed to come into it, so unofficially we do stuff, but it’s very hard.

E: You have to tow the line and not break the law.

J: Why do you think I say I work with people who I know…and they’re people that who are in my circle in this community, so the people who I’m working with are in my circle in this community and I don’t have any problems with them

E: And you can work together without all the problems that can happen when you work with

J: And they help you. It’s like when they performed at the (Wellington) show recently, we had the grandmother and the 3 daughters and Aunty Joyce was here and me, we all sat here with all the kids and Terry came with his wife and we all sat around tye dying and all that making costumes, they all met here they had a dance practice, we made the costumes with them together.

E: This is for the purpose of the show, so you were just sorting it all out here then you went and had the stall over there. So you had people coming and stop in

J: No, they lived locally but they would come here during the day we’d all meet and we’d all get the kids to do some workshops.

E: So it was word of mouth, it’s not like putting a newsletter out and this is the time and date.

J: As I said you pick who you want to work with because of for legal reasons you know this is how you’ve got to work anyway; and it works better, we all work together as a team, the kids all had a great time and as I said they all wanted …and one of them wants to know, has been asking all these questions and like
E: This is one of the kids within your group who performed?

J: Yes, well she wants to be an Aboriginal dancer when she gets older, now this is what she’s come to this conclusion, this 8 year old child, and I think it’s beautiful I just think that that is beautiful, how many people want to aspire to be an Aboriginal person…they look on TV. …look at Roslyn Watson, she became a Ballerina you know because we aspired to be… you know.
E: I’m going back to the Wellington thing because it sounds like it wasn’t really about putting on a performance for the people who were coming to the show but you were just doing it because it was giving the kids a sense of something.

J: Something to do.

E: It’s not because you’re putting on a performance and want an audience to come and sit and look at what you’re doing, was it about that or more about giving the kids

J: No, it’s never about, like it’s a coincidence…look working in Aboriginal visual art, being involved in Building Bridges years and years ago, it was never, ever about the actual audience, it’s good if you’ve got an audience, always is because you get to share with more people. It doesn’t matter what it is, it’s a sense of actually doing something together, having a sense of feeling good about what we’ve done

E: So if people aren’t there watching you, does it matter? Do the kids go oh maybe that wasn’t very good because

J: It was good for them.

E: So they are not thinking people are not coming…

J: Some of them kids hadn’t ever performed before so it was probably a good thing in one …you know you gotta see the positive side of it too, like they would have been shell shocked if they were to perform out on the spotlights, out in the front of the grandstand, or out in the middle of the showground, it wouldn’t have worked out in the middle of the showground…I wanted them to do it in front of the grandstand, but apparently the lighting, they didn’t organise the lighting, so we had to go around the back because the Show Society hadn’t organised the lighting and everybody was in the Grandstands evidently waiting for the fireworks ‘cause we performed before the fireworks. There were still people there, but you know it was disappointing.

E: To you or to the kids or just a general feeling of…

J: To me it was but I wasn’t gonna let the kids feel bad, you never do that.

E: So it’s maintaining what you’re on about.

J: I never, ever do that because the kids don’t feel that their dance was worthwhile, and that’s not a positive message, you know you’ve got to be optimistic with the kids and make ‘em feel…like all of them were doing the hi fives ‘oh you’s danced deadly’.

E: The wider thing is that if you put on a performance you are looking at numbers, you are looking at the people who are coming to look at this performance, I mean, that is pretty much a focus of the work. So, what I’m trying to work out with you is when you do something like moving around or one of these exhibitions that you do or you do the performance with Cedric and it’s about dancing and singing or whatever they are doing, do you really have that in mind if 50 people turn up or 10 or 5 is that.
J: If you make an impact on one person and that person knew nothing, and that person goes away with a...that’s something positive, but it is better the more people that you do have; when you have the opportunities, opportunities don’t come along every day, but you should make the most of every opportunity unfortunately it was out of our hands and...

E: But it’s not the end of the world, you’re not thinking ‘oh we’re not going to do this next year because of the bar’.

J: I could get angry and say ‘they can get stuffed, I’m never going to do this for them again’. What I did was, I just know that next year if they ask us again I’ll be saying ‘well you better make sure you organise it properly or we won’t be there’.

E: So you are not saying we are just going to do this and be nice and not be upset. It is actually stating that you do have requirements.

J: I’d assumed that’s where they’d said we were performing, and we get there and they realize ‘oh, we didn’t organise it properly’, they hadn’t anticipated that either. The Wellington Show Girl was presented just before we performed, so you know, you’ve got to feel sorry for her too (laughs) so it wasn’t just about us.

E: The thing is you have learnt from it and we make sure we state our needs

J: We’re going to get our kids to perform – we’re organising another fun day thing here later in the year, I hope I get it together in time.

E: This is you?

J: This is me and other people I’m inviting.

E: So who thought up this idea?

J: We did a 2 year anniversary from the Bridge and we did a Bridge Walk. You get too caught up in that, then what your goal is, you don’t reach your goal because at the end of the day, which was really, really…I was surprised because there were people there that were part of the other political faction in Wellington, in the Aboriginal community.

E: Enemy kind?

J: Against me because they’re the fellas that were involved in the Native Title Claim and I’ve been objecting to it – and they turned up.

E: Did they dance…
J: No, they were there ‘cause we had the big jumping castle there for the kids and all that too. That was pretty cool too, that was $500:00 for the whole day, yeah so we just had that and the kids…which was good because we had the touch football thing going and then we had the other activities running and the Karaoke was going, it gave them choices and then the little ones which always, everyone forgets about the little ones, that’s why we had the jumping castle because the little ones can go and jump whenever they want to jump and that’s why we went…there was a lot of different ways we could have…but this mob said that I only paid $500:00 for the whole day and I said ‘I’m not going to make parents pay money ‘cause I know what it’s like when I take my kids out, as a parent. If it’s a family fun day, how is it fun if a parent has got to stick they’re hand in their pocket all day long?

E: Which is the normal thing that you would do as a family, you’re going to wherever and so it’s always about having to pay.

J: So that’s why we put on the BBQ and we put on the jumping castle, everything was for free and everybody who went there had a good time. I think putting on an event that doesn’t cost money for families to go to in this economic day is probably the best thing you could organise for families to get together and everybody who went there just sitting around, they all had a good time I even had adults say ‘oh, it was a great day!’ and that to me is a good thing and people got to see the dancing and one of the good things, we had a counsellor involved – they have had very limited…with the Koori community, if anything the Council’s been a very difficult Council.

E: But they are coming around would you say as a result of?

J: Yeah, some are coming around (laughs) some that aren’t.

E: It’s always the same story like there are certain people

J: It’s better that…it’s a positive sign, I like to try and see through things ‘cause I hear people that go ‘Oh, the Council you know rah, rah, rah’ but it’s like ‘get over it’.

E: It’s what you’ve got and you work with what you’ve got and stop whinging about it.

J: Yeah, there are heaps of arseholes in the community (laughs) you know, don’t hold everyone to ransom, you know what I mean, it’s the same with people with a stereotyped idealisms of ‘Ah, the Aborigines’ like a blackfella goes and breaks into a shop down here and then it’ll be ‘all of them Aborigines’.

E: So it’s a prejudiced thing.

J: So to me I don’t like it when they do that so why

E: Why tie the whole Council as being rotten
J: You’ve got a few fellas there, not all of them but you’ve got a few. Then it all boils back down to ‘you’ve got a vote, make it count – you’re sick of ‘em, get up and run!’ You know what I mean, that’s the bottom line, you know ‘cause I’m sick of whingers, I’d rather do something about it

E: Be proactive

J: Rather than sitting and bitching and whinging, why I’m a practitioner, why I work in what I do ‘cause I’m not going to sit around and whinge about ‘oh, poor me’ and all the rest of it – there are things I don’t like, well I want to do something about it.

E: This fun day came out of the reconciliation anniversary. So you had one last year wasn’t it?

J: Two years.

E: Two years ago was it?

J: No, it was last year in May.

E: This fun day is on later this year.

J: Yeah.

E: In the same vein so you’ve got he reconciliation committee, have similar activities, it’s all for free

J: Yeah, I was trying and think of putting a couple of new things in, and I might have extra hands this year which is a good thing.

E: Within the committee or

J: No, they are not in the committee, but I’m roping them in to join in the committee – they’re Koori community – it’s hard getting the Koori fellas involved with it ‘cause they’ve got this fear of because some of it’s we go to the Church, and like, I’m not a Catholic and I’m not in the Church of England, but I still go there

E: Oh, it’s at the Church is it?

J: Their meetings (Reconciliation Group) are there. And to me, it doesn’t worry me, because you know, I’m not going to pray.

E: It’s a building, you’re not going to pray, it’s to talk about stuff.

J: But some people have a problem.

E: Is that you talking them around that and saying what’s the issue and we’re just meeting to talk about things and why not come. Is that the type of thing that you are doing?
J: Yeah.

E: This year you’ve got more people involved.

J: Because they’re people who I know who are doers, I want doers – I don’t want the sit back whingers.

E: You will choose people within the group

J: The ones I know that’ll get off they’re backside and do work who don’t sit around and whinge, because there’s a lot of people in every community – I think it’s the Australian culture, they’ve turned into whinging Australians, ‘cause they sit and they whinge about everything after the fact.

E: Rather than felling that you can do something about it.

J: You know its quite funny when you sit and watch Australian culture and they are, they’re a pack of whingers and it’s always ‘what about me?’, well I get wild when I hear blackfellas going on like that, it’s like ‘get over yourself, blackfellas isn’t about you, it’s about the interest of the whole, it’s not about you as an individual’. There’s a few people that annoy me, and it annoys me because they’re adults, and I just think, ‘you’re a great role model for my kids, you can stay away from my kids’ ‘cause I’m trying to teach my kids a sense of empathy for all life and it’s not about them, just as an individual and it’s not just about the Aboriginal community – we live in a community, you be good to everyone and everyone will be good to you – it’s about values.

E: That’s where the education bit comes in because it is teaching values that are not necessarily out there maybe in the schools or wherever else you’re kids are exposed to.

J: My kids are put into a western system and you wonder why the system keeps failing our kids ‘cause it’s not culturally appropriate. You have a look at the legal system, that’s failing our communities, like we have all these stupid laws in place, like it’s quite interesting ‘cause in 1988 you have a look at how many Aboriginal people were arrested in 1988 and they were arrested under the Summaries Offences Act which Nick Greiner had reinstated in 1988 and that was to control the blacks because it was the anti-bicentenary year and they haven’t taken that law back out and how many blacks have been charged under the Summaries Offences act and a lot of those charges, actually Marcia Langton who’s a really good writer, she wrote a paper called Medicine Square about Musgrave Park (Brisbane) about them going in… it was called Medicine Square because it was about dealing with that bad energy that we talked about earlier, and that’s a cultural thing you know like how blackfellas deal with things, you know, confrontation, yell and scream and get it all out and it’s the same with like blackfellas you see them and they go ‘yeah, they’re all alcoholics’ ‘cause they go and drink down the park in front of everyone. You know they don’t hide behind closed doors, they don’t wear a mask, what you see is what you get and that’s who they are and when they have a blue they deal with that bad energy you know, it’s a cultural thing, it’s conditioning, and
it’s quite funny ‘cause when I was a kid I was in a lot of fights and I used to deal with it and I think about how I was when I was a kid with some of them things and it’s been conditioned into me, it’s an Aboriginal cultural thing, it’s about dealing with your bad energy. It was the stuff we were talking about earlier ‘rah, rah.’ you get it all out there and deal with it.

E: Then you are all friends afterwards.

J: Yeah, but I’m not sick anymore ‘cause that stuff ulcerates, gives you cancer and it’s Spiritually brings you down.

E: So the educational aspect is about these values and in parting them onto your kids.

J: I want my children to learn about who they are and in the other sense in terms of the wider community I think it’s a sense of sharing something with them, for them to learn and not to fear. There is a fear still.

E: It’s educating them about a stereotype that isn’t appropriate and learn who I am.

J: Breaking down the barriers that’s what it’s about, it’s not a bad thing to step inside this circle, this circle’s not that bad, it’s not that scary if you want to learn and it’s a choice and that’s why when you do stuff there’s a choice, you can step inside this circle but it’s a choice ‘cause everybody’s different. Some people they’ll never be able to because it’s just something that they’ve been raised with and it’s something that they’ve been conditioned with and that’s not their fault, but you know you’ll never be able to pull those people in ever, but you know that the next generation. Education is probably the most important key within the whole lot of it because working at Boomalli’s we did have a hell of a lot of influence in the education system, we work with the Board of Studies, there’s a lot of publications where Boomalli’s worked with the Board of Studies that was to do with the curriculum, like they used to use the artists and they used to consult us on cultural stuff when we used to talk to them about cultural identity and there’s all different issues. Like the Board of Studies were really good, they actually had an Aboriginal Unit and they worked with the wider community. If they had to deal with an Aboriginal health issue, they went and talked with the Aboriginal Health Service, it was a really good relationship and those relationships are still, I think in play.
E: Because of the foundations that

J: That were laid before.

E: That’s something that you’re really proud about I suppose and things that you did do and you can see impacted from that educational aspect

J: When we used to do the programs, we you plan a gallery in advance, so you also want to target, so okay you want a youth program once a year, like we did jails...Long Bay, postcards from the Bay (laughs).

E: So you ran programs within these places?
J: No have external exhibitions for them, their work would come into the gallery and we did a couple of HSC shows, we did a little kiddies one, a primary school one at one stage, so it was about targeting different...and we do the members’ exhibition, and we did an Aboriginal...see when I was talking about the Regional membership area stuff earlier, we had the annual NSW show which was about the promotion of Aboriginal Art and Culture from NSW, so that was something that we focused on every year, it was a good thing and when we had the 1st NSW show, that was when they had the NSW Conference, it was a massive Conference.

E: How did that coincide? Did one thing feed off the other?

J: People at the NSW Conference exhibited in the Show and we had a huge exhibition.

E: So they were artists that went to the Conference and the NSW Conference was regarding, what was the focus of that?


E: So they were practicing artists who were actually had something to do with the organizational aspect of

J: It was an opportunity for us to tie links with that Regional contact that we wanted to do, and that was how we got these fellas all involved with Boomalli's and with our exhibition, that we started, that was the inaugural one, which actually a few high profiled artists who are now famous were in that show.

E: Like who?

J: Well, Rea (Nation), Elaine Russell – she was the first NSW artist ever to win an award, she got 2nd in the Telstra Art Award in 1994, so that a pretty big achievement, no-one outside the Territory had ever got there. Yeah that year, the first prize was Western Australia and 2nd prize was NSW so it was like WOW, we got 2nd, but Daisy Andrews won that year. But that opportunity was a great opportunity to finally network ’cause we are so isolated in many ways too, you know in that sense, and that was where they wanted to get a Regional Art Network and the State Government actually set them up but it lasted 12 months because it was set up to fail.

E: By the State Government regulations?

J: Do you know where they situated that person? Liverpool, the Casula Powerhouse, they set ‘em up there and they travelled to a couple of communities, it was just a tokenistic gesture – all the political lobbying we did, we got a tokenistic gesture that was there for 12 months and

E: So really to be seen to be doing something without actually doing something.
J: Yep. It wasn’t constructive at all because it never served the purpose that the whole…but then again that’s the failures of governments that continue to fail regional people.

E: Yeah, if you are actually going to wait for a government to do something
J: Get up and do it yourself as Aboriginal Community workers that’s what we do, you get in there you do it bugger your local council, bugger your Local and State Government and friggin’ Federal Government.

E: Just get the thing going. Get an idea, work with it and work with the people you can work with that’s positive energy, that’s happening

J: Doers not gonna’s

E: Yeah, doers and you just get up and work on something together as a community.

J: And it’s good it’s a sense of…and there’s a social aspect to doing things together, you know like you do things together, it’s just such a beautiful thing to work on something together.

E: It gives you a sense of energy, a happiness thing, enjoyment?

J: It gives me energy, yeah I love it, it’s a spiritual high, I’m just like (vocal gesture to express this high). It’s like a drug.

E: Like a social junkie.

J: Yeah it is. Whenever you see anything that…I’ve always been a person that likes to make people happy too, I try really hard.

E: It gives you a sense of something, it gives you happiness seeing other people...

J: I like seeing other people, it’s a great energy being around happy people, if people get…I love making people…you know…sometimes it’s in your face and sometimes it’s not, you know, it’s hey, I found doing the family fun day not in your face, whereas I did the exhibition and I did that more in your face.

E: So there is more of a political angle to that rather than the family fun day

J: That was different because in the sense that I’m tired of stereotyping in Aboriginal Art.

E: So be strong about it and make a statement.

J: In that sense yes, because Aboriginal culture is so bastardised, and if we’re going to represent Aboriginal Art….and that’s just…Some of the artists that were in the show like in the Movin’ Round exhibition, I knew them, like Rea, she was in the first
inaugural NSW Show and she’s a digital artist, the first Aboriginal digital artist on the scene and it’s also about that whole thing that you’ve got to be a dot painter or a bark painter. Rea’s statement in that exhibition in itself says it all, about the homogenisation and the marginalisation, it’s frustrating as an Aboriginal person to continually have that put in your face when

E: That’s the hurdle, that’s the barrier you have to go over

J: And Aboriginal people like Boomalli's; how it founded was a mob of artists who could not fit within a stereotype and the galleries wouldn’t show their work you got Michael Reilly, Fiona Foley was one of the founding members, Avril Quayle, Jeffrey Samuels, I’m trying to remember them all, Brenda Croft, Tracey Moffat was one of the founding members

E: Tracey, she’s still a director now

J: And photographer, she’s the highest selling photographer, but Michael might break that boundary now ‘cause his work probably jumped up through the roof, I’ve always liked Michael’s work better, but I don’t mind some of Tracey’s stuff, I know Tracey, she used to come to Boomalli's and visit quite often, but she resigned, she decided she didn’t want to be put in that box as being an Aboriginal Artist.

E: She wants to broaden...

J: And I understand where she was coming from ‘cause that’s what it was like, you were put in a box and you were tokenised and you were and I really related to why she did that, it’s really very hard, you’ve got to dissect yourself …because of the way the system works.

E: To fit within it, so for instance this is how you can fit if you want to and then you’re saying ‘no, I don’t want to fit like that’ so then you somehow have to make your own way.

J: She isolated herself, but it was a good move, it ended up being a good move, but Tracey’s got her own ways as an individual and a person too, but as an artist you know, I respect what she did. But you know, you’ve got all the others that have struggled within that system, but it’s frustrating because when you really think about it at the end of the day, like the first famous Aboriginal artist (Namatjira) he never painted dots, he never did bark paintings, but yet they still…because of the mass production, and there something else I really hated, like people would come in and they’d be from NSW and they painted a blackfella with a spear in their hand with Ularu in it (laughs) and you’re like ‘ohhhh’ kitsch coffee tables and tea towels, back to the Nigels and Jeddah’s sitting in our front gardens and hate blackfellas but they’ll have a Nigel sitting in their garden, blackfella with a spear. All that kitsch stuff you know, but we’d take the piss out of it and do kitsch exhibitions deliberately and black humour, like we’d play around with that, there’s some funny artists, like I love stuff that’s on the edge, funny you know, got a bit of humour, it doesn’t always have to be…I love stuff that challenges things, because life is full of challenges and sometimes things are not what we see, so if
something is mentally challenging for me it’s a great experience to actually be challenged and to actually learn something new.

E: So that role of educating is to challenge and to get people out of how they see things

J: And question.

E: And broaden their ideas.

J: Like I wrote an essay and you usually have your questions at the beginning and I finished with a question, deliberately finished with a question – and the reason behind that was because I want that person to go away and ask questions.

E: Do you remember the question?

J: No, it was a question at the end and it was to do with identity and stereotyping because I want people to question things, because the world has always tried to make people to perceive this, you know you only got to look at, like my mum when she got an award, she got a Federation Award, and this non-Aboriginal went up and he was talking to her and he says to her ‘oh, you’re really nice, you’re not like those Aborigines in Redfern’ and my mum says ‘how do you know that?’ Trust me mum to say something like that, ‘cause my mum’s quite quick on the spot funny, like ‘gee you’re a clever bitch mum, only you could do that’ (laughing).

E: What’s the Federation Award?

J: Remember Australian Federation Award, like they give away awards like bi-centenary and Australian Federation and commemoration of Federation.

E: Oh, for her work in the community?

J: As an indigenous worker she got this Federation Award

E: Recognised for her community work?

J: And that guy said that to her. My mum’s been a political activist all her life so that’s why she was like ‘and how do you know that?’ – you know she lived in Redfern like in the ‘50’s and to say that to her, mum’s like ‘I’m sick of these fellas’ but she deals with it really good but that guy would have walked away going ‘huh?’ (laughs).

E: So she made him think outside the square that he…

J: But she doesn’t say it nasty it’s the way she says it, she says it like as a blackfella you know where she’s coming from, but non-indigenous people ‘where is she coming from?’ because they don’t understand Aboriginal people.
E: I think that black humour is something that white people just don’t get. It is the type of humour that is taking the micky out of things.

J: Even in the most tragic times – you’re at a funeral and they’ll make a joke and people will be like…we rejoice someone’s life. It is sad, yes we’ve lost …like I still miss some of the people who have passed on, but they’re always with me and I know they’re around guiding me, and I think I find peace in that too, you know that’s a cultural belief and I maintain that and teach my children that, like we had my…I suppose it was the anniversary of my mother in law last week, and me and my kids went out in the back and we had a prayer to the stars you know cause Nanna’s up there watching over them and guiding them and you don’t forget someone. It’s about to rejoice that, because where there’s life there’s death. It’s in our culture too, and where there’s life there’s death and there always is.

E: It’s a part of the whole rather than beginning and end.

J: You will always see when someone passes on someone’s born and that’s something the old fella’s always say, like when my grandmother passed, my aunty had her baby. Even though my cousin’s daughter they named her after Nan, they always called the other one Sal.

E: Because she was connected to a passing and seeing it as there was a connection there.

J: Yeah, and she looked like her too, like my aunty her eldest boy had blonde hair and was fair and had this little dark - chocolate and vanilla (laughs). That’s just a part of our cultural practices and beliefs that I maintain those things and a lot of those old stories are passed on…not like ‘that’s just a myth’.

E: But you pass it down, it’s an oral thing, I now some people hold a lot of store when it’s written so you should really write it down therefore it almost authenticates it. I think what you’re talking about is something other than that, you authenticate what your knowledge by speaking it and passing it on and telling and educating.

J: Yeah, we go to the cemetery – when my niece and nephew come up, we take them up to the cemetery, I take them around there, and one of the films in the Movin ‘Round was based on that – that’s been a cultural thing, not just in my…but many Aboriginal people do that and I take my kids around and I will tell them stories about all those people who are in that cemetery. I take my kids for a drive around Wellington and I tell them the stories that I’ve been told, as a child, I grew up in the City I would come back here every holiday. Like we were talking about this the other night, it was really funny and my daughter’s going – I said I never went anywhere ‘only Wellington’ and my husband’s laughing because they go ‘we never go anywhere’ like my kids have been all around Australia by the way (laughs). They go we never go anywhere and they go ‘Wellington’ and here I am living here now. When I would come here, my Aunty Joyce she would pick us up and she would drive us around, around Stuart Town tell us stories, take us to Guerrie and tell us stories, like this is how far away she would drive us out this way and tell us stories and we knew a lot of stories about this area because she would tell us.
E: So the stories were connected to land and people?

J: Our family, it’s part of our family history.

E: So you’d go to Guerie and it’s also because

J: My great grandfather was born in Guerie and then his wife was born over at Curra Creek but she had her children at Black’s Camp at Nanamah.

E: So the stories are it’s the people belonged to a place, it wasn’t just because it was your grandfather or aunty because they belonged and it was their country so the story is connected to the country because of where the family member was kind of thing.

J: So it’s all connection and see I’m fortunate in the sense of my family have always maintained their connection in their area, whereas there’s a lot of sad stories but we’ve even got some of our own relatives that we’re finding today that were taken or displaced, or what have you for whatever reasons, because of the history and that. But I’m really lucky because my straight direct line has always maintained a connection. There was a period where…see my great, great grandmother had a short term period of disconnection, she was a young girl, but she already had knowledge and then she was taken to Galargambone and being the oldest one she came back here and her aunty and uncles and all them were all here at Black’s Camp and she was married and lived there, and she actually raised her brother. That’s where I’m very lucky ‘cause that means that I never had…I’ve always maintained a connection. So when people are disconnected, it’s so much harder, it’s a different story, so we’ve all got our own stories and our own journeys and things have happened, but it’s about understanding the diversity within that, ‘cause that’s what I mean as an Aboriginal person, everything that I’ve been through, my experiences and how I see things is because of my journey. So somebody else here will have their own journey and their own differences and that’s what people can’t understand because of the boxes that they put us in. But even where we’re different, we still have a circle because somehow this one connects up with that one…somewhere. Even though we are connected to country and our people, they connect up and the circle gets wider and wider ‘cause we connect up and there’s actually an interesting story my husband told me about an old fella from the Territory who came down and they were at this certain place and he started crying, and he was an elder and he was very high up, and then he told them ‘this is the story my grandmother told and he knew the place, like he felt it, and he was right in what he was talking about – he already knew the story before anyone told him, it’s pretty freaky but that’s to do with…and that’s a fella from the Territory coming down to NSW.

E: Is the story his grandmother told him but was she specific about…?

J: It’s very complex, ‘cause people just see that we’re in different tribes, and we are in different tribes and different languages
E: But he recognized the land because of the story that he was told, it was more that he sensed it.

J: He spiritually sensed it.

E: It wasn’t a map he was given, there that spot.

J: He was clever. So he would have been able to see a hell of a lot more than any of us. And because—certain stories and elements of our stories and how they connect up, like we have connections with people in South Australia in stories and people don’t see that—even though they’re a different language and so far away.

E: And you’ve made those connections, because you know your history, like your people and the oral history.

J: Some of it I’ve learnt—see because I’ve worked in Aboriginal art and culture for most of my life except for my little short stint in the bank, I have been also given information from other sources.

E: So you will know there is a connection in South Australia because of being able to map it all together?

J: Yeah, it’s like a jig saw puzzle and everything happens for a reason too you know, there’s certain information that has come to me that like ‘oh! okay’ Like I don’t have the whole jig saw puzzle. I’ve got bits and pieces of my jig saw puzzle and I’ve been trying to put my jig saw puzzle together because even though I’ve been lucky that my great grandmother made it back here, we don’t know where all of her brothers and sisters are—we know her mother had 25 kids.

E: This is all the stolen generation.

J: Some of them were at Galargambone and that Walawun country which is not even in Wiradjuri country and this is Wiradjuri, and some of them have re-married into families and they’re running around going’ ‘we’re Walawun, we’re Walawun and we’re whatever’ and they’re not, they’re from here ‘cause they were forcefully removed after the goldrush, so when Aunty Joyce starts telling us all the oral history, that such and such are related to us, ‘cause the Peachy’s and Todd Williams’ family and those countrymen, they’re all related to us. We know we’re related through our great grandmother, we know that her mum had 25 kids, we know she reared one of those kids up and we still have contact with his family. When we say ‘uncle Harold’ we say ‘g’day uncle’ he knows we’re related, but to actually physically draw it out, I can’t draw that out because we only know orally but I don’t know how to write it out anyway.

E: It’s not a linear

J: We don’t know all of Granny…see I’m the 3rd generation down from then and it’s really hard because people who are my generation are in their fifties. So I’m actually
ahead of time, so for people in my generation I can’t be understood by the people of my generation ‘cause I’m actually the generation before because of the weirdness in our family lineage, and how it works, because like my mother’s first cousins are old enough to be her parents but my mum’s sister is 20 years older than her.

E: That’s where your connections with the older ones.

J: Yeah, I don’t know, with me personally, it’s been more for my own journey, I’ve always been around older people. I was the eldest daughter, I’m a middle child, I had an older brother and a younger sister so I would sit with adults, with the women, I weren’t allowed to talk, when I was old enough I was allowed to sit, I wasn’t allowed to talk, weren’t allowed to join in discussion but I was allowed to sit.

E: So you were learning obviously, learning from older people.

J: When I was young, I used to sit with them when I was about 14, so I’ve always sat with older people. When I was 13 I was playing touch football…I was tutoring one of them women’s sons in maths and I’ve always been able to get along with older people, yet people my own age, I don’t know. They’re all still partying and going all stupid and I’m over that, I’ve been there and done that, I don’t like hang overs (laughs). Also, as a parent I think I have a responsibility to be a good role model to my children. I think too, it’s about, when my children get older I don’t want to be one of them parents to say ‘don’t do this’ and then sit there – I even gave up smoking a year ago, I don’t want to be one of them parents that sit there and say don’t smoke and then puff away. Cedric will be but I won’t be, because I’m the type of person I can’t tell somebody else what to do – it’s about me being true to myself and that’s what it’s about. The bigger picture about how I see my role in the whole circle, is that by being true to me, I’m true to

E: Other people around you, being responsible.

J: People around me, because I’m being honest and if you’re honest with yourself – that’s part of our culture. Lying is something that’s been – we got into more trouble when we were kids if we lied.

E: So it’s mum passing down that value of being true to yourself and be honest. J: If you got caught out lying, look out, you were better off saying ‘I did it’ and get a floggin’ ‘cause if you got caught out it just wasn’t worth it. See that’s that whole thing about the circle again, because being true to me means that all these other people around me, I’m being true to them too.

E: It’s a ripple effect.

J: Yeah, because they see me for who I am – in Western culture they wear masks and in Aboriginal culture as we’ve already talked about it, it is about being true and that’s actually law – it’s a law, yes it is part of the Bible, but Aboriginal people adopted that Bible because…the basic ten commandments, a lot of that stuff was in their customs and was in their law.
E: It was an easy thing to adopt because it was already there in your own laws.

J: There was lots of laws, but there were main principles like being greedy, like that’s where that whole thing sharing, it was just expected of you, that’s why there’s no word for ‘thankyou’ in Aboriginal custom.

E: Because it was something that was just done.

J: You just did, it was just something that you didn’t have… and here we are discussing it and it was something that was a practice, and this was the influences of Western society.

E: You’ve got to be told to.

J: To say thankyou. You didn’t have to say thankyou, you just shared.

E: It was expected.

J: Greed was just something that was scorned upon – you were greedy, you broke the law.

E: I know a lot of the aboriginal myths they’re morality tales almost. There were things that they do on message stick, anyway the stories are always about a moral to teach children, people about what’s right and what’s wrong.

J: That right they’re the dreamtime stories. Dreamtime stories are to teach our children morals and values.

E: It’s like the Bible’s Ten Commandments.

J: Yeah, our dreamtime stories teach our children morals and values that’s right, and that in its, like there’s a really good one about the flying fox who’s got no friends because being mean to everyone and nasty, like we tell our kids that one all the time (laughs). And there’s one about the galah and a little lizard and they were playing with a boomerang and how the galah got permanently changed and he didn’t recognise his brother because one turned into the thorny devil and the other one turned yeah, and they changed because they hurt each other and they were hurt for life, and they didn’t know each other anymore.

E: Which is a very awful thing to happen.

J: It’s about permanently changing someone too. So it’s interesting like there were value systems and how they taught them, they taught them through stories and that’s how come storytelling is an art and not everybody can tell a good story and I’m bloody hopeless at it. My mother tells a story…I wished I could tell a yarn like me mother ‘cause she tells a yarn really good, like she’ll have you rollin’ round in stitches and that whole thing of black humour comin’ in again, the way she tells a yarn.
E: It’s a look or inflection in the voice

J: It’s the way you tell the yarn, and she can tell the yarn really good, they put their little…their way of telling their yarns and Pauline Macleod was another amazing storyteller, like she had the…and the facial expressions and the…Cedric’s a very good storyteller, yeah he does all the facial expressions, he’s done a lot of work with children and he’s been lucky too, like we’ve shared a lot of experiences with Cedric with his performances and my kids have been a part of that too ‘cause we used to travel with Cedric on the road at one period of time.

E: Was he solo?

J: When he went solo.

E: What did he do?

J: He worked in schools, he did theatre and education and that was through dance, didgeridoo playing and storytelling and that; it was great ‘cause we’ve all been a part of that like we travelled and I home-schooled the eldest, it was, it was great; ‘cause we did it as a family but we got to see a lot of the country, that’s why I said my kids have seen a lot, we’ve been lucky. Because I never got to do that, and Cedric never got to do that when we were kids, we let our kids get close to that and they also learn a lot because when we went there we’d make sure we’d go to…when we went to Tasmania we went to the Cultural Centre and it was so beautiful down there, the people were lovely you know what, you ‘re going to communities and there’s still a lot of culture and community in those communities.

E: That’s what I felt in Mudgee, there is no culture here, there is no aboriginal people here but then you go to look and the place is just reeking with cultural significance, just from the land and the people too. There are people who have got certain stories and you have to go to ask them though because they aren’t going to come out and start telling you and that was what we found. It was the quiet ones, the people that you wouldn’t know that all this.

J: Because when you go up and you make friends with someone and you begin to talk about things with them, sharing things they open up to share.

E: If you are interested. If you are saying yeah, I know you

J: When you’re open to share a person can sense…a lot of my life has been based on instinct – that’s been my survival mechanism I suppose, has been instinct, because you know ‘is it the right time to say this?’ like I’m not backwards in coming forwards, I can tell you, if I’ve got something to say whether it does upset people, sometimes things, people don’t like hearing the truth either and there’s a reality, because unfortunately I see working in this community it’s been infiltrated with a lot of bad energy too and the culture’s been corrupted with greed is one of the things, and I can’t stand greed more than anything in the world, I hate Capitalism, and it sickens me. That is what when I was going back to an arts practitioner I think one of the projects I worked on we took the
kids on a cultural camp here and that’s because when we came here we were approached by Aunty Joyce, we started the Wellington Wedgetail Dance Troop. Me and Cedric did it.

E: What’s it called?

J: The Wellington Wiradjuri Wedgetail Dancers and it was for the Koori Knockout in Dubbo, it was the last united Koori Knockout we had too.

E: That’s football isn’t it?

J: Yeah. That’s the biggest NSW cultural event and our kids performed at it and like my cousin who’s passed on since, he was involved with the Ngarli (check spelling) and all that happened and it was a great thing, but we organised this cultural camp and I put in an application and we got funding, then it was how much am I going to get, you know it became

E: Nitpicking and the fighting.

J: Yeah, it was just a lot of bullshit and I haven’t done anything like that since

E: It just really burnt you and you thought never again.

J: No.

E: Would you say it’s about submitting funding, like divvying up the money.

J: That’s why I said it depends on who you’re working with and that’s why I have this sense of I’ll do my job as a practitioner the way I feel comfortable with.

E: And whether you have money to do it or not is not the

J: Is not the issue ‘cause I make things happen – if I want the kids to perform – we went and borrowed a bus, took the kids down and performed at the gallery.

E: In Orange?

J: Yeah.

E: It wasn’t about getting money to do it, it was just like well we need to get these kids over there lets just do it. Call for a bus and liability

J: We just contacted the Health Service and asked if we could lend their Youth Bus, it’s for the kids and we took the kids up, and we took some of the elders up, the kids performed, the elders watched and that was wonderful because I wanted the Wellington community to be a part of that exhibition because it was about Aboriginal Art from the Central West, I wanted the Wellington Community represented there, Aunty Joyce was
involved in the Opening ‘cause she used to live in the Springs there, which a lot of Aboriginal people

E: Where’s that?

J: The Springs were near Bloomfield Orange, the Psychiatric Hospital, that’s where the Springs were. A lot of the Koori people used to live there ‘cause in the old days when they lived on rations the husbands used to have to travel for work so sometimes they would get their whole family and move up near the work – they used to go down there for fruit picking.

E: The Springs is an actual place?

J: It was a fringe camp. It was called The Springs, but it was like a fringe town, they used to set up all their tents

E: Why was it called the Springs?

J: There was all springs there.

E: So that was what was drawing people?

J: No, they went there for work, they were all working class people, they weren’t just Aboriginal people, they used to set up all tents and everything and they all lived there, it would be all snow and ice (laughs) and they were there to work, it was about survival, that’s how they survived in that period, it’s not like today, and you hear them talk about all the different camps and how they used to travel for seasonal work, it’s just how they had to survive in that period and being a Regional community, whereas today people are so lazy, they go its too…they used to travel for miles to work, whereas today, it’s not the same, everything’s too hard, it’s got to be made easy, it’s the same with conventional shop, like how we shop, it’s buy your dinner out of a tin, out of a packet, or out of a freezer.

E: Where do you see yourself going, I know you have got this fun day thing but I don’t even know if I’m talking about one specific

J: Where do I see myself going.

E: Well with this cultural, community, educational focus

J: Well, at the moment I know that I’m hoping that doors are opened.

E: With what you have been doing so that will lead onto

J: Especially with the art exhibition I did at the Orange Regional Gallery, I know there was a great deal of interest in it.
E: So you don’t really have a plan, it’s not like oh, this is the next step, it’s let’s see what evolves and something may come of it

J: I’ve opened up a doorway and I’ll see which way where it takes.

E: So perhaps someone will contact you or someone will come into your circle and

J: I’ve got plans of what I personally want to do.

E: Which is around the cultural?

J: Yeah, I’m thinking of doing some writing.

E: Like a book?

J: So that’s where I’m thinking of going down that road.

E: About you personally?

J: No, it’s not just about me it’s going back to that circle, it’s for my children too.

E: So passing down knowledge through the written word

J: But this won’t be…it’ll be cultural but it will be on a physical plane like family history, more so it will be about the movements and the travels of our family history.

E: Actual historical events.

J: Yeah. Like the actual events of our people and like, I want people to know about my great, grandmother who was a mid-wife and what she has done. You know she’s left a legacy, like the work that women do and the lack of recognition that they get for it.

E: So it’s from a women’s perspective?

J: Very much, it’ll be mainly that perspective because it’ll be a fair bit about Aunty Joyce in it, it’ll be a lot of her stories and she’s 80 years old.

E: So she will be collaborating do you think?

J: Yeah, we’ve talked about this a lot ‘cause

E: So she sees this as something she wants to do as well, you writing stories about her as well?

J: Yeah ‘cause she knows all of our history. She’s old, like she’s told me a lot, but there’s so much she hasn’t told me.

E: So maybe through this process you’ll get more history.
J: That’s right. There’s a lot of stuff I remember but how I tell it is not in her words and I don’t want it to be in my words, I want it to be in her words because that’s how I see things slightly alter from the way they are, and I want it to be as accurate as it can be ‘cause she was there, she lived it, she saw it, she’s as I said 80 years old, but she also was with my great, grandmother, she was very close to my great, grandmother; she used to carry the torch for her when they used to travel of a night time in the horse and sulky when they’d go and deliver a baby and she’d be there holding the light while she was delivering the baby and she was only a teenage girl, you know, they are wonderful stories, it’s like Florence Nightingale, with the little kerosene lamp, it is, they’re beautiful stories, and no-one knows, people don’t realise the way they had to survive.

E: I’m not sure if we said it on the tape here but this thing about this is a matriarchal culture. This is where you see the culture is passed down from great grandmother to grandmother to mother to daughter. That’s how you see your role in particular.

J: Yeah, particularly because of…it’s also too because of the fear of the Western influence, of the patriarchal society that we live in, like it’s still a man’s world.

E: It’s disempowering.

J: I want to empower my daughter as well. Like my mother and that, they all grew up in a patriarchal system of the Western system, that they were forced to live in and disempowered in some degree, like it’s … how my mother found her strength through that journey, I have had to too and I still have my struggles in this Western system ‘cause I find it’s such a man’s world, as much as they can BS with their EEO laws and their discrimination laws, I know I’ve been discriminated against many times because I’ve been a woman.

E: From what you are saying the law isn’t there to really protect your role.

J: It’s a scary thing because you know men and women are different, you know women can be bitchy, but Christ I’ve come across, especially in the Land Council, it was horrible all them men, they way that they were, I just couldn’t believe.

E: It’s a very hierarchical system and that whole circle idea which I think is a feminine idea

J: And they use bullying, like men together, we live in a bullying world, like you’re not allowed to be different, you’re not allowed to be you know what I mean? And that’s to do with everything I fight against as an Aboriginal Arts practitioner, being a woman has probably made me stronger in finding that road.

E: You’re drawing on a strength that you recognize isn’t just yours but that your part of something that goes way way back. So that’s the strength that you have drawn on.
J: Yeah, so my energy, the energy that I have, it’s just not me, it’s just not my energy. I do have…like especially certain things have happened to me in Country. Like not long ago I went out to the river and something happened and I was very sad and down and I saw my grandmother again, like she’s on the other side and I was like ‘wow, this has happened for a reason. Like that day empowered me a lot because I know she’s guided me a lot in my life. And I know she’s here and I know…my son saw her here in my house. ‘Cause we seem to lose our connection to the spiritual side as we get older, because it’s something we’re conditioned against, and that’s something culturally we wouldn’t have had to live through.

E: Whereas you are strengthening those bonds?

J: It’s about reconnecting myself…as a person in this world…one of my personal experiences that has probably made me stronger has been disconnected from myself.

E: Being a trigger almost to overcome

J: To find myself again. It’s been part of my journey coming back, moving back to Country, part of my journey to finding me. I’ve always been there, but sometimes we can have doubt in ourselves because of all the energies around us, as we were saying before, ‘cause there is so much energy around.

E: It’s knowing how to move within things that actually do give you life and energise you as opposed to things that were taken away.

J: Yeah, being caught up in doing everything for everybody else and that’s what I said we’re finding the energy from within which connects me to everything around me – that’s where I was lost. That’s where the energy is, from within, which is in the circle and everything forms around you in your circle because if it’s good energy, you’re energy’s good, which you’re strong, you know where you’re going, you can see clear…I can still see clear, I can still see where I’m going but where I’m going is not, is depending on the energies around me, because if there’s bad energies that come this way, I’m going to turn and go that way.

E: This is what you were saying you do rely on your intuition or your senses and say ‘hang on a minute this is not where I should be going’ so you kind of double back. You are using not so much a mental faculty I suppose but something is a sense or a feeling.

J: Yeah it is, it’s a feeling, ‘cause if you don’t feel good about something, like we all have a choice in life and we make decisions and like yeah we learn from our mistakes. As I said that’s what we were talking about that ‘lost’ bit…that was the biggest, you know, letting everything just who, you know, swallow me up and not know who I was, feeling lost. That’s not a good feeling. It wasn’t a good feeling being as I’ve always been a strong…I’ve always had a strong personality. I’ve always been a strong person, and feeling lost and was a…bad place for me to be. But I think the thing that’s helped me grow a lot has been my children.
E: Is it because they have been a reason to do what you do or is it because of who they are.

J: No, it’s finding my spiritual…to see as a child, you can see clearly.

E: It’s bringing you back into

J: See as the world corrupts…as a child, you’re innocent, the world corrupts us. So if you can see as a child, you can see clearer – it’s the child’s honesty, and its innocence, and its pure and its …so if I can see as a child, I can see clearer, so through my children, that how I’ve re-grounded myself, as a mother, as a woman – to find that child and to see, has been able to reground me, and not feel the sense of being lost. That’s a very hard journey for anyone because it’s something that we’re conditioned against in society, that’s why I couldn’t see – I could no longer see my grandmother, my grandmother was always with me throughout my whole my life. I had a very scary experience and it was a very bad spiritual experience and it wasn’t even meant for me – I was just there, and it wasn’t there to hurt me, I know that, but I was there and it was enough for me to frighten the shit out of me (laughs). I’m tellin’ you it was horrible – it was where we were too I think had a lot to do with it because there was a lot of bad energies in the Sydney area.

E: I heard this from other people about the moodians or the magnetic lines or something which is something apparently, the song lines, but there are different song lines and certain things have been built on those lines which shouldn’t be there

J: Where we were was an angry blackfella and I knew that it was to do with where we were, and it was because of what was going on and what was happening and who was seeing him, the only fellas seeing him were blackfellas. And he wasn’t angry with the women, he was angry with the blokes, oh except for, no a white woman saw him too. So that was before we even moved in there which was really fun because

E: There’s a violent history

J: Yeah, so whatever happened, I knew was to do with the building on that place and at that time I had very strong connections and that was how come I saw…I believe I let him in some ways because of my strength – when I was young I used to see a lot of different ghosts and spirits and stuff and then I went through a period of

E: This is what you are saying as an adult you are conditioned out of those kind of things

J: Well, no, that experience frightened the shit out of me and it turned me…whereas I didn’t want to see, because of the fear of what had happened, ‘cause I know I allowed that energy. It was partly my fault to a certain degree, but it wasn’t. It’s hard to explain but I know to a certain degree my presence had a lot to do with it, but then that’s what I thought at the time until years later I found out you know what I mean. And Cedric made me believe that too, you know and I listen to him, instead of trusting my own instincts. I had listened to him a lot over that period, and it was, it was scary but it didn’t grab me, it grabbed him.
E: Cedric, so he learnt through it too?

J: The spirit lifted him up not me because I was next to him, the spirit lifted him up physically and it happened just like that (slap hands) but it was the hottest energy I ever felt

E: A lot of anger

J: Yeah it was anger, the spirit was violent, it was a bad spirit too, like instantaneously, the first time I went in there I said to Cedric ‘there’s something in this house’ so I knew there was something in there, and it used to torment us, and the night it came in we were talking about love – weak moment. So we know, I know that’s how come it had allowed itself in.

E: What I’m hearing you saying is that you do know your strengths so it is drawing on your strength and it’s easy to get lost and lose your way and you see people in this community that are lost and you are saying well can’t save them I can do what I can do

J: You can only help yourself – it’s an old saying, old Chinese proverb ‘you can give someone a fish and they’ll eat today, but if you teach them to fish and they can eat tomorrow’ well, I see my role as for those who want to learn, there’ll be those you’ll never let in to your circle
II. Jane Raw Transcript

Jane Austin, Community Educator
Interview recorded at Jane’s home in Wellington Central West NSW
Saturday 15th October 2005

E: Hello Jane. Now you're connected with Jody Chester and I've spoken to Jody about her activities in Wellington, and what we spoke of was her involvement with the Dance Group that Cedric runs, the Wellington Wiradjuri Wedgetail Eagle Dance Group. Is that how your grandkids are involved?

Jane: Yes

E: So, the kinds of things you do are…they’re informal sessions that you have with the kids where Cedric and Jodie teach dance

Jane: Yes, and Tjanara has alot to do with it also. She’s been performing since she was a little girl and sometimes, we all work as a team but sometimes she will take over and I think that’s really good because she’s really proud of her identity. And I think that’s an example, well Tjanara’s an example because she’s been performing since she’s been tiny and so has Ngarla and she’s got confidence, you know, she likes herself for who she is, that is a young Aboriginal woman and I think that’s important and I think it’s important for my grandchildren too

E: Do you see a difference in your grandkids and what have they actually learnt and what kinds of things do they learn from the Wedgetail Eagles dancers?

J: With the grandkids? Oh, yes. They learn mainly and I think that’s unspoken, just by the actions about their identity and lanuage. I think I was talking to the school about they portray the Wiradjuri Nation, and to put it bluntly, like a cavemen style. Like they had no social structure, they just...I know they were hunter and gatherers, it’s portrayed more like weren’t an intelligent race. So the dance, Cedric always tells what the dance is about, like the dance of the honey tree I think it is, and they love that ‘cause they can relate to the story and through that the kids are learning you know how it was, like in traditional days, yeah and they love it and have a bit of fun. So they’re learning a lot about, to be proud of their identity which is still hard in this day and age.

E: It sounds like the important thing that is happening is identity and culture. So its like a learning or a re-learning.

J: I don't think it's a re-learning. I think it’s something that’s going to have to happen for all the kids, like as in Aboriginal descent ‘cause it’s got everything to do with, in any job I’ve been involved in having a positive sense of cultural identity is paramount for a proper mental health, like self worth. You know, like history in Australia has put down Aboriginal kids haven’t they? And even today it’s social at school. Like the parents, like
a friend of mine, one of the kids she formed a really good friendship at school and the friend’s mother said you can’t get around with her no more because she’s black and I mean this is like 2005. So there’s a group of us that really want the kids to grow up with a, do the best we can for a strong sense of cultural identity.

J: And even I get into research and tell the kids all I know, to portray their aboriginality and portray being of Aboriginal descent in a positive light to them

E: So your background, you have been heavily involved in Wellington on different levels, and you’ve been employed as..?

J: An Aboriginal Health Family Worker and in saying that it’s a big job, and I’ll say it’s a tokenistic job. It’s meant to be an all of government response to violence in the Aboriginal community but I must add to that, that they make out it’s funding for Aboriginal people, but I still see non-Aboriginal people, so we can’t say that’s it’s just in the Aboriginal community. But one of the main parts in that was this cultural sense of identity and I think I worked really hard with the women – we had women’s groups, so we’d research our own local cultural identity. And that helps, because that gives me a platform then to say..a lot of the women still don’t understand the impact that colonisation had on them, or – you know there’s a lot of things. And that cycle of violence – if you go back to forming a positive sense of cultural identity you got that basis to work on.

E: So the women’s groups are Aboriginal women’s groups?

J: Yeah, Aboriginal women’s groups.

E: And that’s something that’s come out of the work that you’re doing as an Aboriginal Health Worker

J: Yeah

E: So, is it something that’s outside that role would you say, that you developed it further?

J: Well, I don’t think so, ‘cause the women – like I don’t go in and say, like when you work in that position you don’t say “well we’re going to do this, and we’re going to do that” – they identify that they want their kids to grow up as having a strong sense of cultural identity. And to the point that they want to have a ball, like the kings and princess ball, and that was because there was no grog and the kids all dressed up and they wrote down all about the kids and they were only about, I’d say from about 5 to about 12, and they were all presented, but the pride that came out of the whole – there was 200 people there, but there was no grog, but what a strong sense of family, you know I can’t see too many non-Aboriginal groups just going along, and 200 people – you know they were coming down, and they were saying and of course everyone knows everyone; everyone had tears in their eyes because that’s what they want for their children and say yeah, they identify… some of the kids out of that group will dance with
Jodie’s group. But there’s a strong resistance from, like it was hard, like from Health – like all this ties in, the culture, the dances you know, because they’ve got youth workers and whatever. Joycey used to run the Health Service and she was pretty fair because she had all different families and there’s a lot of families related. Well when the Ah See’s (that’s a family from here, an Aboriginal name) took over, and it’s full of Ah See’s and I think they mean well, but they haven’t got a health background. So therefore it’s turned into, all these programs can’t happen. So that’s another barrier. ‘Cause most of the Aboriginal programs have got this strong sense of forming a positive sense of cultural identity whether it be drug and alcohol, youth, family health, anything that yeah… so there’s a barrier there now.

E: Is it because their positions have been established for a certain reason, and the people that are coming in are actually being paid to do a certain thing but maybe it is more about understanding what the issues are, and addressing those issues, rather than being stuck in a position of ‘well this is my job, and this is my job description’?

J: They don’t even get job descriptions they lost those. But what it is, I’ve been at the Health Service working voluntary before I got the positions I was in since 1994, and that’s when it first opened, and like we had big, huge plays – that gets back to cultural identity, a ‘Healing our Spirits’ Conference the kids – actually we hired, Charles Sturt University 2 drama teachers, to portray a play how the kids felt, and that was about a bit about cultural identity too and they were really good. They went to a World Healing Our Spirits Conference but we had Youth Groups promoting for the Aboriginal Health Service, and most of those are meant to be holistic programs you know, under the principles of Primary Health Care, you know where health is just not the, what does it say, health is just not the – it’s not just your health as such, it’s your physical, social, emotional and most of the programs are tied up into that.

E: So now that these changes have happened with the Ah Sees, that’s not happening as much?

J: No, there’s no programs going out to the community at all, and most of them are based on Education, and I mean Dubbo because it’s a regional centre, they have a fair few programs up there; they’ve got Elder’s group, that’s another group we started during my position, and they identify always the kids and their cultural identity – getting to know them all, because there’s cousins marrying cousins, I’m not saying that in a bad way, but there’s a lot of single mothers. Now just say for instance, I just introduced Calea (granddaughter) and she’s under Clare Austin, but everyone in the community knows she’s Stanley now, but you know what I mean, it’s easy to lose track and they identify to be re-introduced.

E: With your role, you were in a voluntary position, they you were in a paid position, but you had a sense of that wholistic purpose of what you were about, but something’s been lost in how there’s been a new people who have got an educational understanding of what they’re doing, rather than it’s more to do with the wholistic..?
J: It’s more to do with Darren who, well I know he means well, but he’s got no health
background whatsoever. And wholistic, like say drug and alcohol and mental health, that
ties in together obviously and on the strong basis of that is to go out to the community
and education. Like ice, about the effects and about sexual health, or about …in my case
it was about educating about power and control and domestic violence. It just doesn’t
happen in Wellington and that really stunts the growth of everybody within the
community and that’s why we’ve got a Health Service is to go out there…we can go out
to Community Health and get stitched up, or bandaged and that’s just a real clinical view
of it, but with Aboriginal Health it’s taking the wholistic view of health and like I say
that ties in everyone of the programs like having a strong sense of cultural identity, is in
there, written as part of their job indicators, but it’s not happening. And on top of that
you’ve got the Council who’s rednecked. We had a statement from the Mayor the other
day, the non-Aboriginal kids wanted a skating ramp, what do you call those skate board
things, and they’ve been negotiating for 4 years and finally one of the leaders of the
group wrote back in and the Mayor said ‘they’re just a minority group and spoilt little
brats.’ So I mean, if that’s a non-Aboriginal group of youths…

E: How long have you been living in Wellington?

J: all my life

E: You are totally aware of all the issues here, and what do you see as the way forward?
It sounds like there’s lot of problems, and they’re structural from what I can understand,
so it’s people who are in positions of responsibility and authority but they’re not
knowing or not willing to impact what they’re doing.

J: Well I mean obviously the Police have a strategic plan to do with Aboriginal people
and they never, ever use it. Same with the Council there’s certain Protocol, or whatever
they’re meant to be following, and I mean I spent years getting angry, and being
outspoken but I think the way forward is to, like the Australia Day Council, and being
fair skinned I can be on there, and they’ll slip up and say something, and I’ll say…well
one time I was there and something happened, it was about ‘we used to get the Blacks to
come along, no they’d have a social and get the Blacks to come along and cause a fight
and blah, blah and I just sort of said to them ‘well if there’s anyone else other than me,
you’d be all over the front page of the Daily Telegraph.’ In saying that, I’m trying to say
that ‘you’re being racist, I’ll give you a chance’ and I don’t get so angry anymore and I
think that’s the way forward for all of us. Just by me being on the Australia Day
Council, I’ve got the energy and that gives me an opening to start promoting what we
have in the town. Like our dancers, the kids dancing. You know they asked another guy
from another community to do the didgeridoo, and that was fine but we have a lot of
gifted local, and really gifted, like Cedric’s exceptional and he goes around to all the
schools and the kids can relate to him. But I think that’s the way with the Council too
And where you just really get irate. It’s just move forward another way. You might have
to around a little bit

E: So it’s like developing strategy that aren’t..there’s no written code book to say that
this is the way that you can address this problem?
J: No, because it’s entrenched, hidden racism and I mean I remember once it was Neville Brown, but anyway he asked me to be a scrutineer, he was going for the local government, and I was in there doing my job and they actually said ‘pity we didn’t poison some more of the water holes, this is from the landowners. I mean this is only just now – this is going for the Local Government, as a Councillor he actually went for, the votes were being counted and I was so disgusted, it shatters you. You go through years of fighting but you’ve got to find another way you know, of getting around it.

E: And do you think you have found some ways that work. Over years of experience of trial and error there are things that you can do that are effective

J: I think as you say, there are other strategies to go around it. And form another attitude that they’re uninformed. Before I was thinking more along the lines that they’re just arrogant thieves, and I think sometimes it’s just that they’re uninformed because no only did the Aboriginal community missed out on educational programs, so have the wider community.

E: People employed aren’t obviously doing it…

J: They’re not, and that pisses me right off.

E: Is it going to happen?

J: I don’t think so. The way the Government’s got it, it’s tokenistic

E: The other are in my research is ‘do we wait for government policy-makers and because I’m dealing with Arts and Culture, do we wait for the people who are employed in those positions to have the strategies and the policies to implement things?

J: Well, no I don’t think so. But I think when you just said ‘arts and culture’ I think it’s up to that side of it too, to point out how important it is for mental health, self worth and whatever as vital. It’s more vital than providing counselling just to do the bandaid thing ‘cause I think regardless, you’ve got to know who you are and be proud of that before you can …

E: So does that come from initiatives that are instigated by local or state government or..

J: It’s meant to. It’s all rhetoric though

E: It’s supposed to, and they’re throwing buckets of money at it

J: Not really though. ‘Cause you think about this: and I’m quite pissed off about it – I was employed as Aboriginal Family Health Worker, I had to deal with child sexual assault, PANOC that’s Physical Abuse of Neglected Children, Domestic Violence, all forms of violence and work with the perpetrator of the violence. If I was working in mainstream, there would be a separate job for Sexual Assault in itself; there would be
another one Penav Physical Abuse and Neglect of Children as a separate job; Domestic Violence as a separate job; and for me to see a perpetrator while I’m working with the victims of domestic violence, so I see that as not necessarily that they’re throwing buckets of money, it’s just a very tokenistic gesture

E: So the will isn’t there to

J: The will and lack of support because like, I’ll bring it back to where Darren, he’s the CEO down there and he’s got no understanding whatsoever. Half the time these positions, ‘cause we have network meetings twice a year.

E: So you’re still attending as an interested member of the community? Are you still employed?

J: Yeah I’m still employed, but I’m off at the moment…What was I saying? Well they don’t understand your position and the support that you need, because half these people – like I’ve lost kids that I’ve known from this high, to suicide, domestic violence, do you know what I mean what you go through when you know the people, and it’s just so hard. It’s just a tokenistic gesture to expect one person Aboriginal identified position, to do that work and it’s meant to be all of the government response. But in saying that, I was meant to run groups which I did. This cultural identity, forming a positive sense of cultural identity comes into that as a main priority, as it would in drug and alcohol and that’s why I’m so passionate towards doing things with Cedric and…

E: Jodie ‘cause what you see, I’d like to go back to them because you’re associated with them so, how do you see their role, like what do they do in the community as far as you can see?

J: Well they provide an avenue, and I think one of the only avenues for the kids to participate in something that’s going to strengthen their belief in their Aboriginality and being proud of their Aboriginality

E: So you see the next generations actually do change things, so as a grandmother, you’ve got grandkids, do you see that that change has happened with what they do?

J: It’s slowly but surely, there’s still a lot of kids that suffer. How can I… I know I’m going on but like, the netball for instance. From work, they started a netball group as mainly Koorie, and my kids are in it and that. There was a bit of racism hidden sort of, you know like…and we get sick of…you know sometimes you think you get paranoid but anway, there was this teacher from the school. She just got a job, she’d been there for about a year and she for whatever reason, didn’t like hanging around, or going on the teacher’s team. Anyway, there was incident that happened on the netball, and she spoke out and she said, ‘never in my life have I met a community like Wellington’ she said ‘even the teachers it’s all about “watch your own. Who you’re married to” and they do. They go on about who’s kids are what. They’ll be nicer to someone’s kids that they’d be more prone to know. And not only that, you’ve got Aboriginal kids and whatever, so she’d pointed it out to them. But it was good for us, ‘cause you think you’re being
paranoid. What you were thinking was true. Someone come in with a clear view and she just pointed it out, she said that never in her life and this is like at our infant and primary school. So I suppose in saying that, you think well ‘I should be on the P & C, I should be here or I should be there and I think I chose the ‘I can’t do everything’, I’m getting where I’m burnt out but I thought the Australia Day Council with this Cultural Identity for me to put 100% into that would be the way to go first. They’re meeting every month now and every week soon because it’s getting close to where we’re going to…it’s not connected to the Wellington Reconciliation Group – Jodie’s on that. I was on the Reconciliation group before but I mean for me, the way I am at the moment, like I said I nearly suffered burn out, so it’s just that one thing to do 100%. On the Australia Day Council up to date, they have never had any Aboriginal participation or very minimal. (They understand what I am doing there) because I’ve won awards of community work and stuff like that, and all that work I told you…my husband works at the pool. We did a big mural and got everyone together the whole community to put in a volleyball court. Now the kid identified that they were bored, and what they wanted. This went in to Council. This is like in 1994. They said we want a beach volleyball court, we want this, we want that, and helped them make that happen. You know, so that was a big thing and it was spread…I was working on the Council voluntary then. So they knew. And they know that I’m very Aboriginal – you know I’ve won awards for my work in the community, so they know.

E: By you being at the meetings, do you think you’re putting them on notice, in terms of what they say, and if you weren’t there they would say certain things?

J: Well, probably now but I know I’ve got a bit of respect there too. But like, it doesn’t worry me. I’ve grown. If they say anything, I’ll just pick them up. So they’re aware. You know, it probably does, but I’m glad about that ‘cause I can handle that. But it’s meant to be with having Lenny. He was the one – he was Italian in his ‘70’s to say even before I come on, and that’s why he come to get me, so he could retire. It was a fact that there was no Aboriginal representation on the committee, or was there any participation and they’re not even aware, the fact that that’s a Sorry Day.

E: Do you see that at the moment that isn’t happening, so there isn’t any recognition, there’s no Sorry Day, so do you see that at some point that because of what you are doing there, you’re working, you’re chipping away…

J: Very slowly yeah, because you just can’t come out too radical at the beginning. Well I can be, and I had been, but I had to cool it, or I’d kill myself.

E: So you are working with something hard…

J: And each community is unique in their history and their entrenched attitudes, it gets passed down and whatever. But anyway on a lighter note, I for myself, it’s like healing for me when I see the kids dance too, I get overwhelmed. I mean I like to see kids shine, I think that’s what I’m about.
E: Jodie who I have spoken to, a lot of their motivation is their own children. Like have this community outlook, so they’re looking at the wider picture. But they’re really motivated by their own children, they want to see their children…It’s not just about my little patch, it’s broader than that.

J: Exactly…Well, it’s about that extended family thing, you know, because you know and you love all these little kids. You know you look at them and you think…just…yeah. So you obviously it motivates me now because my little grandkids, they’re like, well they’re 9 now, they’re all around that 9 – I just would love to see them just be so proud about their Aboriginality. There are so many that are not.

E: So do you see that happening with yours.

J: Yeah, I do and like we’re working hard to try and help them to achieve that because it is hard work.

E: Through what Jodie and Cedric are doing?

J: Through that and going to their Production with Joseph’s Technicolor Coat because I mean, historically there’s not been that many Aboriginal kids on that either, on the stage.

E: So is this a fairly new development that the kids are getting involved with the community theatre groups?

J: Well, obviously there’s not too many Aboriginal kids, it goes back to that confidence thing, that have been involved in what, sport? And it goes back to probably in the days of having no money or your social standing or whatever. And that’s a good way to open the doors.

E: What is the experience like? Is it open and accepting, or are there little tensions?

J: Little tensions, but nothing that you can’t get by. Like Tjanara she goes really well. And Narla he’s another one. He’s been performing with Cedric since he was in a nappy. Well that’s an example. (He’s very confident) yeah he is. He’s just your typical boy, but that’s an example. And I find Cedric to be…I like his calmness. He’s a good teacher, how he is with the kids and his movements. Have you seen him dance?

E: Yeah, we went to the Reconciliation Day last year, a number of speakers from Sydney (Freedom rides).

J: Because Jodie is outspoken too, probably like me, like you’ve got this power and control thing and I mean maybe you won’t have this on the – I’m only talking, because it’s hard to (L: it can be edited) but like I said about the Health Service the same goes with around the CDEP and all that, about a certain family, it’s power and control and a lot of the ones in the Community that really need help and assistance and they’re kids don’t…and it’s really sad.
E: So what you’re saying, like Jodie you’ve got your back up against the wall and it almost makes you, not strident, but you have to fight, because if you don’t and you shut up and say ‘this is all too hard’ you just disappear and nothing gets ….

J: ‘Cause there’s a whole heap of stuff. Like technically you know you read up, like they’ve got this government or other shoving buckets and buckets of money. But when it’s all said and done, you know like Aboriginal workers haven’t got the same rights as – just say for instance you’re a Union member. Even that, like ring up and say I want to go along to learn about workers, you know what you call to be a Union Rep; “Ah we tried to get someone to come, but they wouldn’t come.” Do you know what I mean. And then I was in a dispute once, and they didn’t help me at all because, it’s political. So I think for them to get involved, Workcover come in…if it was a mainstream organisation they would have had enough to close them down, but because it was Aboriginal they kept passing the buck. Because of that political “it might turn out to sound like its racist.” So you’ve got some of our people that up here, that are ruining it for everybody and are oppressing not only the community, the workers community, and I think where it could help is if they’re very aware of that and could have some for of, whoever gets in positions are really highly qualified and checked

E: Sanctioned by the community themselves?

J: Yeah, the whole community, not just this bullshit where you can be over thrown and whatever. And I’m not saying that in a bad way, ’cause it happens at the Council. It happens in..

E: So does that happen now, the community sanctions a position advertised, and the community actually gets a say on who gets in to them?

J: Well not the whole community, because

E: So it’s the people who have already got the power and control

J: Well just say that the Ah See’s are running the Health Service and there’s a Board of Directors and that’s got mainly hand picked people from their family, whatever. So you have your AGM and it’s usually stacked, and a lot of the people who have got issues won’t come.

E: If you are quiet it almost allows the thing to keep going. And you have to be loud

J: But if you be loud, it can really kill you. And if you were really staunch on justice, I mean twice I’ve been through like I remember when I first started work we had this one CEO and I’ll say it straight, he got away with about $200,000, treated everyone like shit on the…you know, it’s just ridiculous. In saying that, it’s not saying everybody’s bad, but this guy had been around so many different organisations doing that same thing as an individual and yeah, it just ruins it. It’s been like that since…Leanne Dailey used to be there when it first opened, it was just so good, because we’d all get together and do community things. You know, family fun days. We took the kids out the dam. We’d put
a bit of information in there about drugs. We’d always be coming up, and it was fun. It wasn’t like…but she was really from the heart, and I don’t find too many people that are in them jobs are from here (heart) they’re more from their own…and they probably learnt that from the non-Aboriginal sectors…

E: The structures are there and been built up and established, you fit within the structures rather than the structures fitting around where people are at. So I suppose this is what I’m interested in, is that things are happening at grassroots, and that’s what I’m highlighting are the people who are just doing things, and they’re not waiting for a government position to come up, get on Boards, so they will like Cedric and Jodie, they’ve got an idea and they make it happen

J: And just plod along there and it’s something very positive. If the Health Service recognised that’s vital because it fits in everyone of their programs.

E: It’s almost like the life and vitality of a community does come from its people and people are doing it. You know, what makes them do it? Some people will say it’s too hard and I don’t want to do it, whereas others will take the initiative and they’ll get out there and do stuff

J: Well there’s all different people. And I’ve found that out. There’s people are helpers and carers and whatever. It’s not to say the others don’t care. We’re all different. And I think some people are community minded and some are more. You know there’s all different people.

E: You’ve also got to know what your limits are, and what you can do. Like there are certain things that predispose you to work within community, because there’s always going to be clashes and personality differences like how do you deal with the difficulties, it’s not for everybody to take a leadership role

J: I think that I know everyone can’t like me, and I don’t take that personally. And I think you form a strategy around that to say well I’m doing the best I can, and if you don’t like me, well tough, because I know that I’m doing what I feel.

E: So you know that going into what you do, that you’re going to upset some people, that you’ve got a vision at the end of it, that says well I’m not going to start apologising to suit what you do

J: Because it’s part of, it’s who I am and I’ve been through big things on that. I mean even help with counselling, that’s who I am. I’m community minded and I’m…that’s just who I am. Sometimes I’ve prayed ‘why do you have to be like you are, ‘cause you get hurt and burnt and tired, and then you think, I’m never going to go near that again. And then something else happens, and you’re fired up again…

E: So it is like, you feel like a welling of energy?
J: No not now. I’ve learnt like I said, like I think, I’ve got this attitude that the Australia Day Council, that’s what I can handle at the moment, and I can chip away to make it positive

E: You can see results

J: Yeah, without knocking myself out and as I sort of heal a little bit more, I do get a bit more energy back there will probably another thing that I’ll get into. But, it won’t be going into it full on really radically over the top, you know you can, you can get caught where ‘according to Section 60’ you know (laughs) and no more of that it’s just more of how you can find a way around it to achieve it, ’cause otherwise you’ll just kill yourself.

E: So what you’re doing is you’re putting in but you need to get something back

J: Yeah, well what I get back is seeing the kids blossom.

E: So is it about the kids

J: For me?

E: your kids, but it’s also about community?

J: Community kids. For me the whole thing and what I’m motivated by, letting kids have a fair go and especially the kids like, a positive sense of cultural identity and finding where they fit, and who they are…there are opportunities

E: That cultural recognition is not just for the Aboriginal kids in the community…do you see it as a wider recognition of culture

J: Yes I do. Because I used that once in the paper, because I wrote ‘we have to know in order – you’ve got to know where you come from and who you are.’ You know, how come they’ve got genealogy and that – people want to know. You know, just say that…Greek and – it’s still good to know your roots and where you, yeah

E: And it’s also identity is what you’re saying, so if you lose all that through the Stolen Generations or whatever, or however it happened…

J: It’s not even – I can accept the losing, about colonisation. What I can’t accept is that racism stuff, ‘he’s just a little black bastard’ all those things that come in…she’s black, or he’s black, or ‘they’re all the same…they fight all the time, they’re on drugs’ they stereotype – that’s the most harmful part that I’m in it for. You know, promote Aboriginal culture in a positive light is more than just…

E: So with the Australia Day Council eventually you can see that what you’re fighting for which is that stereotyping that that is going to make an impact with the wider community?
J: Yes I do. ‘Cause when I see Cedric perform in like ‘his true light’ so to speak, they will really, really love it. Now he did perform for a little while there at the (hindsight?) last year, but he’ll take one of the main roles this time. You know how they like to hear that - he goes all over the State and he’s world known and everyone wants him, that makes them want him more, and I think that you start to understand how people think, the kids, I just really boom them up and that’s promotion and I think that goes with everything

E: So Cedric is going to perform at that next year?

J: Yeah, the Australia Day

E: O.K ‘cause he’s actually been around. He’s gone overseas

J: He has. Well I told them all that

E: He’s got this amazing resume, background

J: But that’s what I said to them down there. I went on a big speel about Cedric and how

E: He’s quiet

J: He’s not really – Jodie sort of gets in there, but if you really talk to Cedric on his own, he’s very wise, calm and very good with the kids. You know how he explains things and nothing worries him. Cedric got the runner up for what was it, you know Australian of the Year – no not runner up. He come the Finalist to do that. When he was in Sydney. Jodie showed me the thing. So I told them all that.

E: Like it’s almost like the one’s that get there and everyone knows about, big note themselves and they’re in your face. So again, this is coming back to what I’m doing. The people who are just doing things quietly and understated but they’re still out there and doing really important things. But you just wouldn’t know about it. Unless somehow there is the spotlight is shining on them, like what you’re saying

J: Cedric is a humble guy ‘cause he hasn’t burned himself up, or – that’s like Ben (Disabled swimming champion son) he was runner up for Australian of the Year. My son. And he uses a lot of his stuff to – like he takes Pauly boy and them down, like he often goes down to Australian of the Year, no Australian swimming sorry, with Ian Thorpe and all that. They’re in a Jacuzzi so Ben will take either Luke or Pauly boy, and it’s like they come back, and they go ‘I had the time of my life.’ Cause it opens up a world and now Pauly’s down and he’s real keen – He’s boxing. Pauly boy West, he’s one of the Aboriginal kids; he’s about 19 and every time Ben goes away, he’ll give one of the kids a turn to go with him. And it’s good because he’s not showing off – he’s showing them a world…
E: I think that’s what I’m getting at – there’s certain people that will do things because they’ve got an interest which is really a self interest, and I think that’s fair enough, that’s where they’re at. But there’s other type of people that will actually have a bigger vision…

J: …use what where they’ve been to help kids to – and they don’t put it all over the papers

E: this is about me. And somehow I believe that does tie in with people who do create culture – those people that have got the bigger vision and where they’re creating something that’s bigger than themselves and they’re own concerns. So

E: That’s the type of thing I’m interested in – what it is that makes, kind of drives people. I suppose we wonder about that too, but I know that I’ll do my bit, and that my daughters will do their bit, and my grandchildren, and that’s – I don’t know if that’s a thing that’s passed down or…

E: With your own mother?

J: Yeah, my own background. Cause sometimes I think, in order to understand things you’ve got to live it. But then there’s people that live it, but they don’t – so I don’t know what the reason is that…but I do know and I’ll be honest because I’ve gone through this hard time at work, that I have been trying to find out more about myself and there are different sorts of people. And there are helpers, and there’s people that are car salesmen, there’s people you know all different natures, and um I suppose if you go back to traditional Aboriginal times there was people they used to pick - the women would pick the next people that would come up that had that quality and whether it’s got to do with that I don’t know, but I’ve always been, I remember back in the ‘70’s my girlfriend and I were always interested in things, I suppose it was the ‘70’s but…you know we left school early but we were always interested in issues, like social issues. She went on to get a job and she lied that she could use a typewriter and she got this really good job, but she stayed home all weekend and learned how to basically… Anyway, she’s got this really, really great job now, and we always laugh about it. But going way back and when my kids were young, she’d send me things, like her boss went over to South Africa and done a thing on the children of the apartheid, how they used to oppress the children there. And I mean, so I was really young, so I had that interest. And don’t ask me why. And I think Jodie’s sort of the same

E: Jodie’s had a lot of influence, like her mother; she’s got a very strong relationship who has been very actively involved in community activity. And I think Kevin Cooke who is

J: Yeah Cookie

E: Yeah, so he’s very politically active
J: Well mine were very submissive, but mum was always um,...Mum had a life, and she was non-Aboriginal – where she was put in a home, in the convent when she was 4. So it was very similar to like what had happened to the Stolen Generation and stuff. So she had issues there. But my parents wouldn’t even go and see a school teacher. ‘Cause they felt…Dad was very shy. But then they must have given me something…they did, I mean the talks and stuff.

E: And sometimes ‘cause you are in those circumstances, I mean it’s enough to just start to question, yeah

J: I think I give dad back his pride in his Aboriginality. Once I did the history. He’s given me this great big leather brief case and started telling me stories and stuff that he hadn’t mentioned for years and…him and his brother

E: So you’re a vehicle to him coming back to his own identity, like it’s a healing thing.

J: Yeah, I think it is too.

E: And he’s local?

J: Yeah. So, you could ask that question all day, and you’ve got to say that there’s some people that are just

E: that way minded

J: And some people are born from really red neck families and come to be…so you how does it happen?

E: Which is a good thing to know. That you can’t assume that someone’s going to hold a certain view

J: Yeah, that’s right.

E: So there’s always like an openness to know, that it could be not the way that you think – like your own prejudices and stuff

J: And I think you learn that lesson not to judge a book by its cover, it’s hard

E: That’s part of the problem, that people are doing that…so now the thing I was going to ask which I think you’ve answered is what the kids are learning from being involved with Cedric and Jodie and it is the dancing, but it’s like confirming something about their self esteem and confidence and identity and culture – there’s a wide array

J: Yeah, so remarks bounce off on…I am this strong Aboriginal…
E: this strong. And this is as an outcome of being part of involved with these performances?

J: Yeah, partially and to do with… mostly I suppose to do with that ‘cause that is at the moment the only avenue …

E: apart from Joseph’s Technicolor coat, which is the community theatre thing

J: Well, that’s to do with their self esteem and socialising – but their learning about their culture with Cedric and it’s a positive thing for them because there’s nowhere at the schools or anywhere that it ever is portrayed in a positive light here in Wellington. And I know it looks good and that in Sydney and all the concerts and things that they have. You know and that Canberra’s got heaps, but kids in the lower wage bracket – you can’t get out of Wellington. So this is their world and there’s no positive…

E: But that is a positive

J: That is very positive

E: They moved here for country? Like they were living in Sydney and they are here because of the Wiradjuri thing, so that’s really interesting how that’s kind of happened and they’ve connected to…

J: Well Jodie’s really… I think Joycey (Aunty Joyce, Wiradjuri elder – Jodie’s mum’s sister) must have needed her to. And I must say Joyce has been a strong influence to me too.

E: O.K ‘cause I know she’s very strong for Jodie being her aunty and that

J: Yeah, ‘cause back in ’94 she was the one… all the elders would come to the house and even when I didn’t…I was only working voluntary, ‘can you help me do this, can you do…?’ You know, and Joycey’s just handed over the Aboriginality. She knew our family. I didn’t even know there was any such thing.

E: So identity for you was something you had to come to because of your own parents, not identifying, your dad. So you came through a process yourself of actually having to come out and just say…

J: Well I really didn’t come out and say it. I just come out as me - Jane Austin. Seen some injustices around racism and and wrongdoings by Police and the community, and I really verbally went on the war path and we got strong media coverage, even as far as the Telegraph and everything. So that was good for me. Because I didn’t come out going on about my Aboriginality – I went out on the war path as saying ‘these Aboriginal kids… my friends.’ Like we always knew we were Aboriginal descent, so don’t get me wrong there. It wasn’t about me taking this big strong statement. But it was like I went out in a big way to make a point when I seen an injustice. It did a lot of positive stuff.
E: So people like Joyce, would you say they were like a role model to say ‘they’re the older generation.’

J: I didn’t really – dad knew Joycey and whatever but it wasn’t until after this happened to me, where they come – like Billy and Joyce. I think they seen me as someone that was able to say what they were feeling. Yeah, that’s how I truly felt and I think that’s with Jodie too. They feel that we can get out there and put it like say it. It’s hard to explain, but you go to somewhere like the AH& MRC and whatever, you’ve got to be politically correct – come in at the right time and whatever. So I made ground with the Police and that’s sort of seen and think ‘god’ you know like…they wanted me like on Ombudsman things, like where they were so frustrated, ‘cause it is hard to know how to

E: So they worked through you to get a voice out

J: Yeah, and I think that’s with Jodie too

E: So you with your support. Who are your support people that back you up? I mean, I know that there’s people

J: Ah, well there’s Jodie. And there’s Joycey and Jenarra – this is another Jenarra and I’m really lucky because when I went off work…not lucky in that way, but – I was off work and I went down to the Club and I hadn’t been out for ages and I had the women down there begging me to come back

E: Is this the club…?

J: Well we had a Karaoke – I went to the Club the RSL – everyone was out for the Karaoke, all Aboriginal women or whatever. And they’re begging me to come back because I was the only one that was giving educational programs as in Women’s groups…I had been off work. And when I was at work we had women’s groups and Elders groups and we did Identity things, trips and whatever. And I’d been away and when I went down there, there was, everyone was out, yeah. And um, you know they were begging me to come back and I felt really really positive and that ‘cause there was a cross section of the community, and I felt like I, at least

E: You were needed and acknowledged, being confirmed or something…

J: Yeah, you know and I was in tears and I’ve really, really wanted to go back but I just think I can’t until I’ve healed a bit. It’s working in them roles

E: Now this is a recent thing that’s just happened?

J: Yeah

E: O.K so you’re only just coming to your own, what you mean in this community
J: Yeah, and it was really, really good to just to know that…
Interruption
L: thankyou for your time this morning

End
III. Melissa Raw Transcripts

Melissa Lucashenko, Writer/Community Educator  
Interviewed at Melissa’s home in Byron Shire  
10 May 2006

E: How would you describe what you do Melissa?

Melissa: Poorly paid (laughs)

E: Right, money that did come into the equation later on, so money is an issue for a lot of people because it can stop you from doing the things you want to do, because implementing an idea…

M: It doesn’t actually stop me because Bill (husband) supports my work luckily. I’m not, and probably in terms of writers in Australia, I’m not that poorly paid, but you know compared to a real job, it’s not like getting a regular pay cheque in your bank account. But then I’m free, I get up in the morning; I don’t have to go to an office and that’s what I prefer ‘cause that’s what I do obviously.

E: So you see yourself as a writer. If you were to describe …

M: Yes

E … how you see yourself

M: oh very much

E: but first and foremost as a writer

M: In terms of jobs, yes, yes

E: As in money earning

M: Yes, oh yes, absolutely

E: So do you have any other way that you see what you do?

M: Yes, I sometimes see myself as a teacher and literally, ‘cause I do some work up at the high school, and I see myself as an educator through my writing and through my speaking. Like when I do public speaking I’m trying to educate mainstream audiences and I’m trying to wake them up I suppose. I’m trying to pierce their everyday experience and sort of let a shaft of light in where there might not have been any light before about black issues or about sort of human philosophical issues
E: So, but specifically related to Aboriginal issues… Specifically or is it really a wider net that you cast in terms of educating

M: It’s pretty close to the black issues. I mean I nearly always use Aboriginal, what I’d call Aboriginal philosophy, I suppose or Aboriginal stories to do that, then that can go anywhere.

E: So it’s like having a concern for wider human issues…

M: It’s having a concern that people, people’s humanity can be realized

E: Is it specifically, place specific, like Australia?

M: Well because I normally speak to Australian audiences, yes

E: So do you have a more universal kind of idea of what your trying to put out there, cause I know that a lot of people in your position, I suppose, would see themselves, as Australian and there is a particular story that we tell which is very specific to this country. Or is it not really about that - more we’re a brotherhood of humanity and we’re all connected regardless of, where you happen to live or be?

M: I think we are all connected, but I, I’m influenced by the work of Barry Lopez who talks about grounding yourself in what’s local and in your local community and working for your local community and telling the stories that are relevant to your local community. And I guess essentially I believe in working on a small scale, because that’s where I see changes being possible. Maybe on a national level, I go around the country speaking to people. But I don’t know. I’ve never thought of trying to influence things on an international level, it just seems overwhelming… you know, the media and that…

E: Yes. Ok so local meaning that you’re located here on the coast

M: Far north

E: Far north coast of NSW. So is this where you are and so you know your issues that are local to where you are?

M: It’s about relationships. I’ve got relationships with local people and because I’ll go back to the festival again and again and again, I’ll build up relationships that I don’t even know about with people who come every year I suppose. And that’s the only way you can ever influence people, is through the relationships you have with them.

E: Ok, we’re talking about the festival, meaning the Byron Writers Festival

M: Yeah

E: So that’s where we are now
M: Yeah

E: and we’re actually on our way there today

M: Yeah

E: and do a few more talks today, which is the last day. But you also go to other conferences…

M: Yeah, festivals mainly

E: and they tend to be writer focused

M: Yes, have been. Yes

E: So the relationships you are building are really wherever you go. So if you happen to go to Darwin, you are seeing people that you would see fairly regularly, because you’re traveling around with the talks that you do, so you are establishing and reestablishing connections with certain people

M: I am with the writers who travel. I mean the relationships you have with your readers are at a distance, obviously, because they pick your books up and read them and there’s a relationship there that you only see the book side of it and they’ve only seen the readers side of it until you meet at a festival. But I get feedback, enough feedback to know that I’ve got a readership and a black readership that’s getting something very valuable from my work. And that’s what keeps me going usually.

E: So would you say then that your readership is your community. As a kind of community

M: It’s a community that I contribute to. But I think I contribute more to my local community with people I meet face to face. You know week in and week out

E: How do you contribute to that community, the ones you see you see all the time?

M: I write a lot of letters to the Echo, the local paper. I write articles for the local paper. I work at the high school with Koori kids up there; I give talks locally at local non Aboriginal conferences. You know, I’m a known person in the community and I’m known as Aboriginal and for speaking on Aboriginal issues but also outside those issues too

E: So when you’re going to school and doing stuff with the kids is it like within the curriculum

M: No
E: or you’re just going as a guest speaker

M: It’s not curriculum stuff usually

E: So you are invited to speak about certain things

M: Yes

E: Particularly about...so it’s not curriculum based when you’re actually asked to go in because I know that you’ve been also asked to teach at university or to present part of the curriculum for uni

M: oh I do lectures at uni

E: lectures, yeah

M: have done lots of lectures over the years, yeah

E: Ok and specifically related to, what you’re actually lecturing about are Aboriginal issues?

M: It can be Aboriginal issues or it can be about writing. I’ve done both

E: Writing…so the people you are talking to are people who want to write themselves or…?

M: Often, yes

E: So what kind of communication do you establish with those people? Is it just like…what I’m trying to get at is, do you stand there and talk or lecture, and that’s it, then you just go away; or does something happen in the engagement with those people that your educating?

M: It’s more than just standing there and lecturing. I don’t know it’s, I’ve never put it into words before. But it’s just about being a part of a small rural community I suppose and I’ll see people in a number of different contexts. Like I might have, will have lectured to some of the people at the Writers Festival here this weekend, and then a lot of those people would have read what I’ve had to say in the Echo (local newspaper) and some of them would have read my books and then others of them I would have a social relationship with on top of that and some of them, I’ll then go to the high school and talk to their kids. So it’s sort of multi layered

E: So with the kids, cause I’ll know that’ll be a different group that you’re talking to, obviously it’ll be on a different level. So how do you present material to them?

M: I do it through telling stories as much as I can. And then if I can’t do it through stories or if like, it needs something extra, I’ll have one or two key points I want to make
in a talk. And ah, I’ll, oh what’ll I do. I suppose sometimes I’ll contrast the way white society approaches an issue and then say, oh but in black society. That’s something I do pretty commonly. But yeah, usually it’s stories. I gave - I don’t know if it was NAIDOC week or something else - I gave a speech; it seemed like the whole school, but I think it was half the school at Mullimbimby High School, and I started out by reading a poem that the kids were rapt in. Not one of mine it was a poem by somebody else and I knew that that particular poem would get their attention. So I used that and they really liked that and I talked about. And then I told them about what I did at Darwin Writers Festival last year and the old lady, Aunty Hilda Muir; I helped her finish off the book. I just told them her story about being taken away and just the hardship she’d went through and how she ended up. And I used her story, and then I circled around and talked about what had been stolen off them, because they hadn’t had the benefit of Aboriginal culture in their own life.

E: Do you go in prepared or do you just wait and see?

M: No, I usually go in prepared

E: Do you know where the kids or the people that you’re talking to are at and you’ll prepare material for where they’re at?

M: Yes, I try to

E: Now with the stories that you’re telling, is it like stories you know of other people and do they tend to be…what I mean, I know that I’ve spoken about this with other people that are indigenous – that there is an oral tradition of telling, educating; or it is about passing on culture and it is totally about telling stories.

M: Yes

E: So, the stories that you tell are about your particular experiences or are they about other people?

M: They’re both. If there’s something that’s happened to me that will work I’ll use that. But if I have to use someone else’s story then I’ll tell them it’s not my story, this is what happened to blah, blah, blah, or this is what someone wrote and blah, blah, blah. And I do that really deliberately, because stories are the best way to teach. No doubt about that, absolutely the best way to teach.

E: Do you find that there is an engagement when the kids - you can gauge where there at by how they’re responding to you?

M: Usually, yes

E: So they’re kind of communicating, they’re talking; there’s a communication that’s going … what you’re doing and with them responding to you?
M: Yes

E: And it’s verbal or is it…?

M: Can be, can be…I mean yesterday, I don’t know if you were at that talk I had yesterday. I don’t think you were. There were four of us speaking and when I finished speaking the applause was really loud and there was people cheering and that was a way of me knowing that I’d actually hit the button

E: And obviously people ask questions too?

M: yes

E: people think where are they coming from. It might not be where you want them to be?

M: It doesn’t matter where I want them to be really I mean it’s not about that

E: Yeah. So if they’re not really getting a particular issue, then it’s ok?

M: Oh yeah - You know, it’s about the dialogue is half the point. It’s not so much that I want to go in and give people particular information. It’s not that I want them to walk out knowing what happened in 1975 blah, blah, blah. It’s about, like I said opening people up, piercing they’re consciousness so that they can go away and hear what others have to say and actually learn to listen

E: This might be a little bit of a hard question, but have you found that sometimes there has been someone that has completely challenged your view and that you’ve thought, maybe you’ve had to go away and think perhaps that’s a point that you wouldn’t have seen before, or that maybe they’ve changed your point of view?

M: I try to be open to that. Ah, pretty rarely, pretty rarely. I won’t say it’s never happened, yeah

E: But you’re aware that it can?

M: Yes

E: Cause I know that the issues you talk about can be really challenging and I mean there is a rising, I believe, I mean this is my opinion, there is a thing that people are saying now - it’s ok to be politically incorrect and talk about things like, well Aboriginals always get the hand outs. So there is a confidence that people have now which they didn’t have before Because you were kind of branded a racist if you held certain views. Where as I think people are coming out more, out of the woodwork and whether that is a good thing or not a bad thing, I don’t know. But the thing is if they’re actually speaking…
M: Yeah, it’s a bad thing. Because Howard has…that word that phrase politically incorrect which is a term used to battle minorities I think. You know it’s a weasel word. And yeah racism is becoming socially acceptable again

E: So you often hear people saying things that they before wouldn’t have said

M: they wouldn’t have said ten or fifteen years ago

E: So it’s really difficult to hear that without reacting. So I think your role, how you’re describing it, is that it will be really a very important one now in terms of people thinking things that are just really difficult to listen to. So how do you handle that? Like if someone is quite affronting and up front about what their views are, where culture kind of crashes against things and then you think is this going to survive or is the other point of view going to become the norm?

M: Well, I challenge it. I’m pretty much always…I try and be respectful and polite when I challenge people and I usually go in pretty softly if I’m trying to… I’ll give you an example. There was a woman, there’s a suburb of Lismore called Goonangari and I heard this woman talking about it as coonangari, which is what people say. And this was in one of the local shops. And I didn’t know her and I couldn’t believe my ears, so I just gave her a filthy look and let it go, not let it go but just sort of gave her the benefit of the doubt. And then went away and I stewed about it for hours and I felt really powerless and you know, upset about it. And then a week later I saw her again and recognised her and she’s not a local she’s from over that way, and ah I thought “you beauty” and she looked at me and I think she knew what I thought about it cause she sort of moved away in the shop and turned her back on me and didn’t want to front me. And I went over to her and I said, “Oh excuse me. Were you in the co-op the other day?” and she said “yes” and I said “and did I hear you talking about Goonangari and calling it coonangari, and she just back tracked really fast, “oh no, no I would never say that, and I’ve heard people say that, but oh no I take people…” And I could of let it go there but I thought no, I’ll just push it a little bit further, and I said “Well that’s good, because when I thought that’s what you had said, you know I’m Aboriginal and I found that very offensive.” But I didn’t swear at her and I didn’t rant at her, but I was just very, very clear and that’s the way I dealt with it then. But when I speak publicly I very rarely get that. And when people do, when people are confronting at a festival or something like that it’s my way of educating the mainstream audience is to listen respectively to what they’ve got say and respond respectively. Because just responding in that way is more powerful than even what I say in response. So that taking the issue seriously and having a respectful relationship even if the person is an idiot. You know respecting their potential to learn

E: I don’t really know how I feel about this rising of people being so articulate, vocal, I don’t know that they’re articulate, but they’re vocal about views that are obviously racist. But somehow I think it is an opportunity to actually vocalise and articulate things that people feel and haven’t necessarily felt comfortable saying. I mean now they do and I don’t know whether that’s right or wrong or it’s good or bad, but the thing is that they are. I suppose what I’m saying is do you think that there is like a culture evolving? That things are actually being spoken about now and there is an opportunity for people, quite
possibly like yourself to be able to tackle it head on rather than it’s all seething underground and there’s a consciousness going on, which I think this country has had an awful history of just blanketing and silencing things, whereas now people are speaking. And I think what you do as a writer is articulating and speaking things that probably people haven’t spoken about before, and on the other side people are saying things that are not the right thing to say, but they’re saying it. So I’m just wondering if you are seeing it as maybe there’s a positive side of it that you are able, or given the opportunity to talk about things that people just didn’t want to or they wouldn’t have maybe ten years ago. Is there another side?

M: Yeah I know what you’re asking. I guess if they’re asking questions it’s good, but if they’re just making racist statements then it’s the same old same old and it’s a bad thing

E: Right, so if they’re not open to being changed, then they just won’t

M: If they’re genuinely questioning then that’s a good thing If they’re just parroting racism then it’s not

E: So what do you do with the ones that are just trying to make a statement, they’re just trying to push?

M: It depends how you feel on the day and you know there’s a lot of white supporters and a lot of white allies out there that will take those people up. It’s not just up to Aboriginal people to do that work

E: So what’s changing.? Is anything changing?

M: Yes, levels of knowledge are changing. There’s a generation of young people growing up who know that massacres happened, who know that children were removed, who have some small understanding that things were done that shouldn’t have been done. And that just, that wasn’t the case when I was growing up

E: So has that got some relationship with having such a right winged conservative government in power that this change has happened or do you think it would have happened regardless of the policies going to the right

M: I think it’s because the apartheid system of the missions ended in the early seventies and you got generations, a couple of generations of Aboriginal people now who have entered the universities. There’s a mass of literate Aboriginal people, there’s a mass of, you know we’re not segregated on missions in the way that we used to be, we’re living in mainstream society and influencing mainstream society and getting into the media and the television and the books and the education system. It’s a geographic thing

E: So that tradition of story telling is being able to be exploited more, so Aboriginal people are getting more able, or have access to being able to tell stories through, possibly like yourself, you’re a writer, so you’ll write. Whereas other ways, other’s other mediums
M: Oh yeah

E: So like film, maybe film

M: and music

E: Music. So all the forms of communication that you know are there to be exploited, which wasn’t, those opportunities, I don’t think were really available

M: No

E: So this thing of story telling which is deeply engrained in, well that’s what I would say, in Aboriginal view of the world

M: Yes

E: That’s being able to kind of come out and people are able to hear a lot of those stories

M: Yeah. And oh what was I going to say: I think 1988, the bicentenary had a big impact that’s still being felt now, because of the protests and because that was just a historical turning point I think

E: Ok, so we were talking about the 1988 bicentenary and this was actually a really major issue for Jodie when she talked about it because it was a turning point in terms of her politics and where she was going personally

M: Yes

E: And what’s interesting about that is Jodie is from Wellington Wiradjuri nation. So what you’re talking about is that the impact of the bicentennial to you, up here…

M: I was actually talking about it nationally. You know I think the bicentenary raised issues for the nation and that they were dragged out into the open. That was, for me that was a huge dragging out into the open of stuff that hadn’t been seen or heard before

E: So what we talked about at the time was there seemed to be a silencing by the mainstream media. Like we got the party and we got Hawke up there and you know everyone was throwing streamers and banners and making lots of noise, but this underground was happening and you really had to be almost had to be watching away from where all the action was to know that it was happening

M: No

E: No?
M: Oh, maybe I was too close to that underground to realise that, but I remember, oh what’s his name. Oh I remember lots of different people doing stuff in ‘88 and it just seemed to me be, certainly that’s what I seem to remember about ’88. And I think, I think even if the party and that was what was prominent at the time, I think for me that was the start of a different kind of a dialogue. You know that was the start of, maybe it was only the radicals who were listening, radical whites who were listening in ’88, but you know, ten years later in ’98 when you’ve the Mabo decision. You know it’s probably as much the Mabo decision too, that lit a keg of dynamite under Australian society

E: and we haven’t recovered since, like its still happening…

M: It’s still unfolding and it will be for decades, cause you know it’s gonna take decades for native title to be sorted out through the courts

E: so the cats out of the bag. We’re having to deal with it whether we like it or not

M: Yes. Actually when I think about it Mabo was much bigger than the ’88 bicentenary

E: o.k. Now the other thing I’m interested in is your role in helping other writers. So when you actually help the other writers like the one you mentioned in Darwin was it, you helped …

M: Oh, Aunty Hilda

E: …finish her book or were you instrumental for the whole project?

M: No, I came in it late. She had another writer helping her for most of it, then they had a parting of the ways, then I came in and helped finish it off, basically

E: So did she ask you or did you just know about her?

M: Jackie Huggins asked me because she’s actually Liz’s, Liz in Brisbane, her husbands grandmother

E: Oh Liz Mackinlay (musicologist University of Queensland), yes because she’s actually got a very deep connection with the Yolgnu is it or

M: Yeah Booroorla people

E: Booroorla people, oh ok, that’s got a wide net from what you’ve been saying?

M: Yes very wide

E: I suppose one last thing is just in terms of money, cause I know that this is a question that I do ask people because it can be an obstacle if you feel that you really want to be doing more but you’ve been hampered by not having the finances to do it.
M: I guess for me, it’s more about time than money. You know I’ve got a farm to clean up, I’ve got two kids on my own a lot of the time because Bill’s overseas. So I don’t have to worry about the rent, because Bill gets paid well but, it’s just that I don’t have the big slabs of time. And that community work, all the stuff at the high school, all the little things, going to local writers groups, all that stuff, when you’re trying to fit it in between nine and three, it’s just not much time left for writing.

E: So it’s not about not being paid, it’s the time

M: Yes. Although I guess if I was a millionaire I could pay someone to clean up the farm for me, and then I would have more time - time is money

E: Well my interest is how much is money important and does it actually stop or hinder or is it the thing that will get the project up and going if you did have it?

M: Well I can’t see that, I wouldn’t have written four books and done lots of essays that I’ve written unless Bill was supporting my work. I don’t think that would have happened. I might have written one book maybe two at a pinch, but yeah, it’s pretty important.

E: And in the future is it going to be something that’s going to get in the way you think or you’re pretty much on track in terms of where you’re going and what you’re doing. Is it only just a sideline; it won’t get in your way and stop you from doing things?

M: No, I know what I can do now, so it’s getting easier from this point

E: So that’s a nice positive point to end on. Thank you. I know that you’re in a lot of pain from the fall you had yesterday. So thank you very much for talking with me today.

M: No worries
IV. Jill Raw Transcript

Jill Bower, Community Educator
Interviewed in Jill’s office, Kelso Community Centre Bathurst
25 June, 2007

E: I’m with Jill Bower and we’re at the Kelso Community Centre which is next to Bathurst. Is Kelso kind of Bathurst?

J: Suburb, yes it’s a suburb.

E: So Jill, you’re the coordinator of the Kelso Community Centre?

J: Yes

E: And for how long has this place been operating?

J: 12 months. Just slightly over 12 months, its about 14 months since it opened. Its 12 months since its had a full-time coordinator.

E: And like you’ve been the coordinator since the beginning?

J: Yes

E: And you are pretty much on your own, or do you have a staff?

J: Well I do have some staff but they’re not here every day of the week. I have a receptionist 2 days a week and a youth officer 2 days a week.

E: And what are their, the youth officer, what do they do?

J: Its community liaison and to try and set up programs for the youth.

E: OK then and so, I’d like to cover a lot of material but maybe we’ll say also that you are at uni and you’re doing doctoral studies with Sydney Uni?

J: Sydney Uni. In indigenous languages

E: OK. And this is your first year?

J: Yeah, I’ll be finished at the end of this year. I’ll be doing it in 12 months.

E: That’s amazing. That’s a lot of work. Is it block release?
J: Yes its block release. Whilst last semester was a lot of preparation for this semester in terms of the research that we’re required to do.

E: OK. And do you hope that you’ll be applying this qualification?

J: Yes, I hope so.

E: In Bathurst specifically, or do you see it as a wider thing?

J: Possibly here in Bathurst to begin with, but because I’m not Wiradjuri, I can’t teach the language here, but the knowledge, on how the language works, is slightly different, so that I can do. Its, yeah, so hopefully.

E: OK, so I suppose I should also try to clarify that the Kelso Community Centre, is it an identified place?

J: No.

E: So it is really for the wider community, not just…?

J: Its for the whole community, and regardless of what your colour of skin is or what your national background is, the centre is here for you. It just happens that I’m Aboriginal and the coordinator.

E: OK

J: Its not an identified position and the centre isn’t identified only for aboriginal people

E: OK. And like what’s your language?

J: I’m Ngiyampaa

E: And that’s from?

J: Cobar.

E: Cobar, right

J: Cobar area, yes, I guess is the best way……..

E: OK because we’re new to this area so I know that, you know, when you come to an area, are you local and those issues kind of come up

J: Oh well, I was born here in Bathurst

E: Oh, OK
J: My grandfather is Wiradjuri but I am Ngiyampaa by birth, by my mother’s line. I am Ngiyampaa.

E: OK then. Now because this research is interested in impact of people who are involved in making culture and specifically looking at indigenous, you know, activity that goes on locally, you know I am looking at that and how this centre, and what you do in this centre, works in with the local indigenous communities, so I just happened to be in this morning when you were all trying to organize a camp, so that’s something you do?

J: Yes. Its something that we have been doing for about 4 years and this year we’ve changed it slightly.

E: So, the camps? 4 years ago?

J: We originally started them about 4 years ago with some health funding.

E: So when you say “we”, its obviously before being here as a coordinator

J: Yes

E: So you were doing?

J: I was working with the Department of Education and the community members and myself and along with Veritas House, sought some funding to do it and we got some. We ran it for 12 months under the health, with funding from health, and then we applied to ATSIC, the old ATSIC, and received funding to run it. This year is the first year we haven’t been funded and that’s basically been because of the changes to ICC, nobody knew what they were doing.

E: So ICC is?

J: The Indigenous Co-ordination Centre

E: Right. OK

J: Which is the new ATSIC.

E: OK right. I’m not up with all of that

J: So we were given some money from the Minister for DOCS to enable us to run some of those camps this year.

E: Right

J: Whilst we sought funding in other areas
E: Right. OK. I mean, it would be interesting to know the framework of all of this and with the change of ATSIC how that has impacted on you, as a community cultural person, like has it really made a big difference?

J: Yes

J: Its impacted quite significantly on the community because, just taking the culture camps, we had very good outcomes and then, all of a sudden, we had no money to continue with that program, and it, really, costs us about, roughly, anywhere between $50,000 to $80,000 a year to run those camp. But in saying that, there is approximately about 150 kids that go through the program each year, and that’s not just aboriginal kids – the majority of the time it is aboriginal kids- but we try to, or we do, two camps each year which are classified as reconciliation camps which is, the aboriginal kids get to chose a friend to come and participate in the program and we adapt the program in accordance with, you know, the children that attend. Now on those camps, we not only do cultural stuff, the cultural stuff is always delivered by the elders from wherever we go, and we do go wide and varied places. We go to Brewarrina, we go to South Coast, we go to the Central Coast, we go to Gilgandra, we do local ones, and the reason that we do go far afield, is because its about re-connecting kids with their elders in their home communities, because our kids come from quite a large cross section. So that’s the idea behind that, and the theme of the camps has always been about respect, respect for yourself and respect for others. And that’s all delivered by the elders, all the cultural stuff.

E: Are those elders here, or do you actually tap into the elders?

J: No, we tap into the elders where we go to. So if we’re going out to Booral that is the elders out there. If we’re going to Bourke, it’s the elders from there, South Coast the elders from there, or locally, the elders from here.

E: So, is it a good network?

J: We’ve got a great network, we’ve got a lot of supporters of elders from right across the state who have supported our program and can see the benefits of the program. There’s other communities that are now trying to run a similar program, that we’ve allowed Cowra in particular, we’ve allowed Cowra to come on board to get some knowledge and experience on how they operate it, how we operate it, so they can set up their own similar program for their kids over there. So its not an easy one, you’ve got to have commitment from the people in the community, its a big commitment, but it’s a worthwhile commitment

E: So would you say, I know its about people as well, key people, but is it about like money? If you didn’t have it, then you would not do it?

J: No. No. For many years prior to funding, we did do it without funding, and the money normally came out of our own pockets, to do it with the kids. Roy and I have been taking kids away for 20 odd years, doing stuff with them, but now costs are a lot higher,
we’re getting older, so we’re reliant on younger ones coming up through the ranks to start to fulfill those things that we’ve been doing, and it’s like anything, if we’re expecting them to go out for 4 days, then they need to be paid or otherwise they could’ve been doing 4 days paid work somewhere else. Yeah, so I mean, the program’s about employment for local community members as well.

E: As the leaders?

J: Well, they’re the supervisors, the adults are supervisors. Everybody has to go through a police check, a working with children check. All our staff have senior first aid certificates. We take them through the courses whenever their certificate is coming due for renewal. We do have volunteers, people can volunteer to come along, and we have had occasions where we’ve had volunteers, we’ve encouraged parents to participate in the program as well.

E: So, with the other things that you do as a coordinator for this community centre, what kind of things do they kind of cover?

J: Here?

E: From the centre

J: Anything and everything. Lets see. We do, a lot of health things are delivered from here, which includes sexual health, and a needle exchange program, which is strictly a needle exchange program. It’s the only one in the state that stands by “exchange program”, so if you don’t bring back, you don’t pick up. That’s the community’s wishes, so we abide by that quite strongly here. We run, like I said, sexual health, women’s health, baby health, mental health, drug and alcohol counseling, legal aid service, play group for the little ones, after school sporting activities and things for the kids, art classes, TAFE programs. So it’s virtually only limited by the community’s imagination, so if the community come to me and says we’d like to, for instance, at the moment we’re in the process of doing a computer literacy and job preparation program, that’s because the community asked, not because we think it’s a good idea. Its got to be what the community needs.

E: So when you say “we”, do you mean that you have..

J: I have an advisory committee which is made up of local community members, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal, and we meet once a month and we go through and we’ll talk about what’s been happening as well as information that is being fed back to those people as to what people would still like to see happen as a service from here.

E: So do you act, like, as a representative of that community or do you have, like, autonomous powers; that you can actually say “I’ll appoint this person – they can run this class”?  

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J: Oh yeah, no, no. I can do that. Yeah. No. The advisory committee is that, an advisory committee. Its not a management committee, its an advisory committee. The council is my employer.

E: Bathurst City Council?

J: Bathurst Regional Council. So, yeah, your advisory committee’s there to maintain that we are doing what we are set up to do.

E: And they elected positions or…?

J: Anybody can be a member of the Kelso Community network. There are elected positions in it, on the executive, and any member of the community can participate in the network meetings. All you need to be is a resident of Kelso.

E: Oh OK. A resident of Kelso?

J: And that includes the greater Kelso area, not just Eastern Kelso. Primarily the centre has been set up to accommodate for what we call East Kelso, but that doesn’t exclude anybody from using the centre. So, we have people come over from West Bathurst, because they feel more comfortable coming here to get the service than they would going somewhere else.

E: So is it kind of unique in the way it operates?

J: It is. Its fairly unique in that most other community centres don’t necessarily function the way we are. They’re more, they’ve got stronger guidelines on how they operate, as opposed to community need. When community need changes, and we need to change with the needs.

E: So you need to adapt fairly quickly to address issues and then its the advisory committee that is up on what is going on?

J: Yes. If anything major is sort of happening in the community that is causing either concerns or issues or people feel that there’s a need for us to be acting or looking at something, we will often call an emergency meeting to have a look at what we need to, how we need to, be responding to what’s happening. Now that, its not necessarily, sometimes its not necessarily what’s happening in our community, sometimes it can be through press….

E: Oh yeah

J: That becomes very negative towards the community and whilst we stay quiet for a little bit, there usually comes a point where we need to respond

E: Do you find that the media is responsive and positive to any of your concerns or do you find…?
J: What we’ve found is, overall now, we’ve developed a good relationship with the media and they are much more – well, they are more responsible in the way they report.

E: Right. OK

J: Now, which sort of stops a lot of the negative

E: So it’s been work that you’ve needed to do to change attitudes, or…..?

J: Well, its to change attitudes, but just to make people realize that a couple of words in the press can cause great distress in the community.

E: Right. OK. So it comes to this issue that I’m interested in with people who are cultural practitioners and the educational role that they play. So, I mean, how much of that do you see that you do, I mean education?

J: Education? A lot

E: 90%?

J: About 90%.

E: To the wider community?

J: Yes, its to the wider community but there’s also, we also do things that may be directed to the aboriginal community, so whilst people can, you know the centre’s here for everybody and we try not to run programs that are only for individual groups.

E: Exclusive?

J: And we’ve never had an issue. We’ve just finished an aboriginal peer support, women’s support, group - they graduate this month. There were a couple of non-aboriginal girls that wanted to do the program, they weren’t excluded. Its up to the group.

E: If they choose to include?

J: We’ll say to the group, “Look, you know, we’ve had some interest from a couple of people who’d like to do this course”, whilst we know its aimed at aboriginal people, does anybody have any….. And we’ve never had any objections come forth. People have always said if they want to do a course, let them come along and do it. Its not an issue. Sometimes we get aboriginal funding, sometimes we get mainstream funding and we try to open things for everybody. The youth drop in centre that we’re trying to organize at the moment, of an evening, whilst initially the funding will come from the Indigenous Coordination Unit at Wagga, it will be opened to all children. So, it won’t
matter – they’ll fund it initially, because that was where we were able to get funding to do it

E: Now when you say you are able to get funding, is it that you need to actually apply for grants?

J: Yes. I have an operational budget of $20,000 a year, which has to pay phone, electricity, security, garbage, consumables, all those things, you know. So everything else that we do is reliant on funding. So I spend quite a lot of time on the computer doing submissions.

E: Is it you that is mostly responsible? There’s nobody else, no-one from the advisory committee that is ……

J: They will work with me. They work with me but.

E: So you would source the funding – “Ah, that would be appropriate for this project?”

J: Yes. What happens is – somebody will say “Well, why don’t we..” - I’m trying to think of something – say they want to do domestic violence, run some stuff on domestic violence, so they’d tell me what they want and then we work out, “well this would be the budget” and I’ll sit on the computer and try to come up with the funds to do it. Which often means that you might put that one application into three or four different bodies to get what you need.

E: So do you tap into any of the people….. I know that Hannah does this with the arts network and arts people, but are there any other people like that that you work with, that are mainly responsible for grants and advice on………(tape ceases)

E: Yes, so that was the funding side of it. The other thing you say is interesting, is culture, and everybody’s got a different definition of what culture means, so that became quite clear, so what would you, I know it’s a very big area, but if you had to describe what you, how you would define culture in the way that you practice as a community?

J: To me culture is spirituality. Its about continuing with past practice and making sure that that doesn’t die, whether it be language. You can’t have culture without language.

E: Are you looking at this specifically from…

J: Specifically from an indigenous point of view. Culture, but then you can have a community culture too, which is a different thing again.

E: Is it like a shared vision……?

J: Yeah, well I see that its about us having a dream – well, say for example, the centre, it was aboriginal and non-aboriginal people coming together. It was a community culture – its about those people coming together and saying “we need this”, and then over 10
years, over a period of 10 years, get everybody on side and eventually to the point where we had funding to build it, to do what we wanted to do

E: How long ago was that when it was just kind of like an idea?

J: 10 years. 10 years, its been building for. So that’s a culture. It was a culture of community needs, so there were people within the community that all had the same vision and everything – it didn’t matter what colour their skin was, their vision was the same, so they were able to come together and …. 

E: But was it through Bathurst Regional Council?

J: No it was a community initiative, initially, and through a lot of negotiating, working, lobbying, Council came on board.

E: Oh OK. But have they moved with the times in terms of where people are expressing what they would like and Council..

J: Yes, most certainly. This is probably a really good example of it, this centre, of how Bathurst Council has – we know that there are community centres at Eglington, Raglan and West Bathurst – none which operates like we operate – they operate “you book, you use”. There’s no coordinator there, there’s nobody coming in to deliver the health services,..

E: So its not specifically for – it doesn’t have the indigenous outlook like the other ones?

J: Well, its not just the indigenous outlook, it’s also the fact that this centre’s situated in a Dept of Housing estate, as they call it now, which we can all laugh about, but its situated right in the middle and it was the need of that community and the push from the community to get this.

E: From the Dept of Housing area, like the estate area? (tape ceases)

(Tape resumes)
…..grants and advice on.

J: Yes I do. Department of Housing has a community, I’m trying to think of a proper title, its about community grants and community projects, so she works with us, she’s just started working with us on Wednesday afternoons, and part of what she’s doing is to help source, to look at sourcing funding, and to work in with submission writing too. So, its not…..

E: Its very difficult, I know how difficult this area is, so do you find it is fairly successful – like, you were able to get funding in this way, or..?

J: More would be nice.
E: But enough to?

J: We’re getting money to run what we need to run. In saying that, we can always use extra dollars to run other things, but we (indecipherable) about we’ve got funding for the language program, we’ve got funding for the kids, we’ve got funding to set up the computers and keep them operational for two years, I’m just trying to think, we’ve got funding for NADOC week.

E: They’re all different little pockets?

J: They’re all different little pockets and its time consuming doing those different little pockets, but at the same time we’ve got funding for a community project in terms of the lawn mowers and building pride in the Kelso community, so there’s all those other little, they’re all little buckets, but they can make a fairly big difference. My conversation with lots of other community centre coordinators that get, you know, fairly big grants of money every year to run programs and never make any difference in their community, had discussions with me and they said “Well, how come you do such a good job?” The reason we do it is because we don’t rely on funding. We rely on the fact that TAFE gets funding for outreach programs, health services are funded to provide those services to the community, so all those things don’t cost us. They are necessary services for our community but those programs are already funded by the government. All we are saying is, you need to move your location for a couple of hours per week, and outreach. So, you know, and too many people, especially in aboriginal communities think that money is the answer to everything. Money is not the answer.

E: No. It’s the people?

J: It’s the people that you’ve got there, pushing the programs and getting the programs, and doing what the community wants.

E: So there’s no hidden agenda.

J: Its no good becoming a veterinary nurse (indecipherable) course out here if nobody’s interested. You’ve got to listen to what the community is saying and run with what the community wants.

E: And the community speaks through, like, the advisory committee?

J: Yeah and people are able to walk through here at any time and say “Gee, have you thought about this or this?” I’ll say “Oh well, what do you think our interests would be?” So we might do, we do up little notices to get interest levels – it might have something like “Are you interested in...?” One of the things we’ve got at the moment is “cooking on a budget”, so how can you prepare good healthy meals on a budget, and the other one is foster carers, aboriginal foster carers, we don’t have enough

E: Oh OK
J: So we do up little sheets, people will fill them in, if they’re interested, with their contact details. When we think we’ve got enough people to run a course, then we approach TAFE and we’ll say “Righto, we’ve got 8 people in the community that want to do the cooking one” and they’ll come on out and do that.

E: Right?

J: And the same with the foster carers – we do that through DOCS. We’ll say “Right, we’ve got 8 people out here that want to become foster carers and we need you to come out to talk to them and train them”

E: But the main that $20,000 is really the Bathurst Regional Council?

J: Yes. It’s the budget allocation. Now there’s also a bit of funding that goes in from rentals of the centre. All the services pay a rental fee, it’s a set fee for the 12 months, depending on how much they use it. Its not exorbitant. Its anywhere from $500 to $1000 a year, which is, just covers my time to assist them, things and that, but it also gives us that little bit of money that we can play with for special things like Christmas parties for the kids, or, you know. Tree planting days here, run BBQs, and general clean up days – it just allows us a little bit of funding there that we can flex with.

E: ....Housing area, like with the estate area, the people that live here have been active in…

J: And we’ve got a very active community in terms of wanting to make change

E: And they live here, like they actually belong to the area?

J: I live in Kelso, I could have lived anywhere else in Bathurst, I chose to live in Kelso.

E: Kelso East or West?

J: Well I actually live just across the road, what they consider West Kelso

E: Is there a difference. I mean, I’ve just seen it visually

J: Well, there is a difference. I mean, basically I own my own home and I live over there. I can’t own my own home on this side. Its all Department of Housing with a few smatterings of privately owned homes, none of which would accommodate my needs, more so than anything else, but I spend a lot of my time, not only my work time, but my out of work time in the community.

E: Because we’ve had a question about how there has been an area which is away from the CBD and the main services, and how that must really impact and effect the people who, I don’t know what the bus services are like here?

J: It really effects you – if you live out here, the majority of this community do not own cars.
E: Yeah.

J: The community that we target. Now, in saying that, that covers down to the new end of Bond Street here too, most people down there own their own homes and have got transport. If you live up this part, you don’t, a high percentage don’t have transport, so if you’ve got a doctor’s appointment at 2pm this afternoon, you’ve either got to go into town 1.5 to 2 hrs before any you’ve got to wait 1.5 to 2 hours after your doctor’s appointment to get transport back. The bus service is better than it was, through a lot of negotiation with the Dept of Transport

E: This is through here?

J: Yeah, it was done through the community to improve that bus service. Now the bus service has improved, but still there’s that gap of time. There is no medical service this side of the river, so there is no medical service and there is no pharmacy. So if you need a doctor’s appointment or you need prescriptions, you have to go to town or you go to Trinity Heights. Now, Trinity Heights has a doctor’s surgery down there and it has a pharmacy down there, but again it’s the same issue – it’s a long way from here to there.

E: So who is aware of this – is it just the people who live here, because they have to deal with this on a daily basis, or, I mean, is it really an issue?

J: It’s a real issue for us – we’re looking at different avenues so we can hopefully in the future be able to provide some sort of medical service out of here.

E: So really try to get services to this area?

J: Yes. Martin Phillips Chemist has a really good relationship with us – if people are unable to get down there, they can bring their scripts here and I can fax them down to Martin and he will deliver them.

E: So it is up to people like yourself, maybe, to look at what people need and to develop…?

J: There are some things that, you know, we’ve just got to - maybe take us 2 or 3 years. The centre’s only been open for 12 months

E: But it’s a vision?

J: In the 12 months its come a long way but there’s still other things that we need to do, other services that we need to provide.

E: So its like a shared vision, that people who are on the advisory committee to solve, and people who live here are aware and say “well maybe we should do this and develop this area” – so its something..?
J: And they understand that some things are going to take us longer to put into place.

E: But it sounds like there is this positive….

J: Well it’s a dream and nobody’s – you know, as everybody says, when they look at this building now, they remember that it was a dream 10 years ago. So its not an impossibility.

E: And people feel that its not a despondency or negativity, like this thing can happen

J: Yeah, it can happen. I mean, you know, initially we found it difficult to engage the older people in the community, because they see it as being for the younger ones, and its taken us some time to engage those, but we’re now at the point where we have the older ones come over to have a cup of coffee, have a yarn, talk about what’s happening at the centre, what they’d like to see happen at the centre, what skills they have, because there’s a lot of older people in this area, and they have quite amazing skills when you sit and talk to them, and want to share them with the younger people.

E: Is that something that is happening?

J: Well, it is something we’re currently working on – we’re trying to put it into place an “adopt a Nan or Pop” because we realize through talks with the older people that a lot of them don’t have their grandchildren around – they live in other towns and communities and a lot of our children in the community don’t have their grandparents around, so it’s a case of hooking those old people up with families.

E: Does it happen here or is it really out in other people’s homes?

J: Well, some of it will happen here, like, you know, we might run knitting classes or crocheting classes or, you know, for the boys it might be motor bike or bike maintenance or something like that. Whatever boys are interested in. And some stuff will happen here, but we’re also looking at that interaction, where they can invite their new Nan or Pop across for dinner with them, or they can go and visit them. That interaction between the old generation and the younger generation.

E: That’s a great idea.

J: Because it is an issue for us and its something that we’re working to improve.

E: And the other area of interest is the relationship between art and culture, like, do you see there is a direct link between, when I say art, its not necessarily just painting, its like that view which is beyond just numbers and number crunching and administrative things?

J: Yeah, no, there is that connection and there is stuff that we do here.

E: Like it’s a creativity, I suppose that’s what I’m getting at?
J: Yeah, We’re looking at the moment, we’re trying to work with the youth (drama, whatever it is) group in town

E: The theatre people?

J: Yeah. We’re looking at that because we have lots of kids that are quite talented in that area, white and black, and we’re looking at how we might be able to run some of those sorts of things out here. The other thing that we are trying to find funding for is Crocfest, which would be a combination of aboriginal and non-aboriginal kids putting together a performance and then being taken up for the Crocfest festival, and everything. So, yeah, as well as, we’ve got kids who are quite talented musically. At the moment we’re trying to find out in the community people who have got the knowledge to teach, whether it be musical instruments, regardless of what it is, because there are kids out there who are quite talented and we need to…..

E: So the kids are going to school or after school.

J: Yeah, it would be an after school type program, where, you know, low cost that parents can…

E: So the people who would be running the classes or workshops would be paid?

J: Well, not necessarily. They might be volunteers. It might be a free thing. Its something that we’re working on in terms of, we’ve had a couple of people come forward that have, that are teachers in those areas, that are willing to give time.

E: And run workshops here?

J: Yeah, and run free workshops for kids. Because there’s a high cost in music anyway. The cost of musical instruments isn’t cheap, unless your kids play a recorder.

E: They bring their own or something?

J: Well, most kids don’t have their own. So I guess once we get that one to nearly when its ready to work, we’ll put out a call to the community for old, where people might have musical instruments stuck away in a cupboard.

E: Not using?

J: Not using, could bring them forward for the kids to use.

E: So with the idea of creativity, do you see that that is something that’s linked with culture in any way – like, in terms of how culture is generated, passed on – like, with these things, like the Crocfest, because it’s creative

J: Well, it is. Its very much linked to culture. Whether it be dance, whether it be them learning an aboriginal dance, a traditional dance, or whether they’re learning an Irish….
E: It's like a method of teaching?

J: Yeah, it’s a teaching culture and it’s a community culture of acceptance and tolerance. Learning other cultures help people to be more accepting and tolerant.

E: And you do that through, like, a creative media like the arts?

J: Yes, well that’s why we’re doing it through, why we want to get the theatrical stuff, because you can cover broad issues with theatrical things – you cover topics such as tolerance, racism, and you know.

E: So will it be a plays written by the..?

J: It will be the kids

E: So this is something again its an idea that may…..

J: Well, hopefully it will happen. We’ve been in negotiation

E: Is it the Bathurst Players? Cause they’re recognized….

J: Yes I think it is, Bathurst Players…..They came and we’ve had some discussions, and it will happen, its just a matter of us all coordinating.

E: Working out the how and the strategies?

J: Hows and the times and things like that. So its well in the process of happening.

E: You’ve got that play “The Holy Day”.

J: Yeah, “The Holy Day”

E: So that’s going ahead?

J: Yeah. So what we want to focus on is not that the children use, the youth or the kids that are part of that program in there, what we’d like to do is bring both groups together, so the kids from our community and the kids from the other parts of Bathurst come together to work on…

E: Right, that’s the idea

J: Things, yeah

E: Aside from this other play that they’re working on?
J: Yeah, so it wouldn’t be just the kids from Kelso, the idea is that we get these kids with common interests together

E: Right. But there has to be a lot of trust between the different groups that possibly …..

J: I believe that it will work

E: So the age group is what – like, 15 or….?

J: Oh no, no. Younger than that. The kids can actually participate I think it is from about 8

E: OK

J: There’s 2 different groups, I think. There’s an 8 to …..

E: Yeah, there’s a younger group and there’s an older group

J: And then there’s an older group. It might be 15 to 18, or 14 to 18. She did actually say but I can’t remember.

E: Think it was 6, but you know, whatever.

J: Could even be 6

E: But it is the group, you’re tapping into both groups. So, you’d be working with both.

J: Yes, yes. What we’re finding is that a lot of kids, especially aboriginal kids, won’t go in to participate in that sort of thing in town. One, its lack of transport; two, its lack of parents having the funds for their children to attend those programs, so what we’re trying to do is move the program out here

E: With the expertise, and the skills that they’ve got, and run it here?

J: Yeah. So its not….

E: Its going to be a voluntary thing?

J: We won’t run it. They’ll run it, just the same as they’re doing in town, and whether it will be once a week or how it will work….

E: Possibly funded, so that they will cover….

J: Yes, and what we’re currently doing is looking at avenues that we can fund the costs of the children attending. So there’d still be a cost. I think its something like about $50 a term.
E: It is just the logistics. It’s the reality that you’re paying for things?

J: It’s a service, yeah, and there are means to pay for it, its just a matter of finding the right one.

E: OK. Now, I suppose this will be one of the final questions. There has been some talk about Australia needing a cultural policy and there’s lots of voices saying “No. We know who we are, because, you know, we’re into our sport and we’re very secure in our national identity” but there are other voices saying “Well, we’ve never had a cultural policy in Australia”, even though Keating in 94 tried to institute this with indigenous input and it just all fell by the wayside when the new government and administration came in. But do you, from your angle, because you’re working in the community and you see how these other structural organizations work together, and how they impact on people on the ground, do you see that its an area, like, that needs to be revisited on a national level?

J: Yeah, yeah. I do believe that it needs to be revisited. People need to look at it and people need to look at how they deliver, and why I think a cultural policy is important too, I think people have to look at how they deliver those services to the wider community, so if you’re being, you know, either partially funded or funded under the umbrella of a particular organization or government thing, then you need to, I don’t believe it happens, I don’t believe people look at how they deliver…

E: I think I understand

J: … to the wider community. They’ll look at how they deliver to that little core group, but not to the wider community in their delivery.

E: So its not just to find their funds, they need to address those policy guidelines?

J: Yeah, there needs to be something that says, no matter what your racial background, no matter what your cultural belief, no matter what, that the services and the service providers right across, are delivering to that. Whether its because you come from a low socio-economic background, which can be a culture in itself, whether you are a high flying entrepreneur, whether you’re from one of the Arab countries, or whether you’re aboriginal, people have to look at how they deliver to those different…And, as we see, culture not necessarily to do with race, it can be a culture within a community

E: How people identify within themselves as that community?

J: Yeah. So there needs to be, and I believe that the only way government is going to ever change those things, is to have policy - that says, you know, that people need to look at the cultures and to look at Australia’s culture – I mean Australia’s culture is made up of many, many different nationalities and even different groupings within the nationalities. So you can be an Arab, but you can be Christian or a Muslim, you know. So there’s two different cultures.
E: Is it about identity? Who we are as a nation?

J: I think it is about identity, because, we still, the perception is amongst people that Australians are white, of you know English or, you know

E: Perception?

J: The perception is still there. We still don’t see ourselves as a country of multiple…

E: Races. Or…?

J: Yeah, and we still don’t acknowledge the history of the country.

E: So, does that happen at a policy level, that whole recognition of history?

J: Yeah, because I think that unless it happens at a policy level, its never going to happen at a lower level.

E: Can it happen at any other level?

J: I think now to some extent it happens to some extent it happens at the lower level but don’t happen at the policy levels

E: At the lower level because people like yourself are going into the schools and teaching the kids things that adults probably don’t know?

J: Well, that’s right, and adults don’t know – you’d be surprised at how many aboriginal parents have come back to us, in particular with the camp stuff, and they’ve said, you know, their son or daughter has come home from camp and they’ve been talking to them about……

E: Things that we discussed at their camp? Is it language or is it history?

J: No, its not just about language. Its about language, its about history, its about culture, its about yourself, and self respect. We run a lot of different programs within the camp program,. So we do things like drug and alcohol camp, drug and alcohol issues with the kids, we run sexual health things, given that the focus group previously had been high school kids, mental health as well as, you know, physical health things, you know, diabetes and, you know, all those kind of things.

E: So the parents are learning from their kids?

J: So the parents are actually learning from the kids but they’re also learning the cultural stuff from the kids because the kids will come back and they’ll say “Did you know that you shouldn’t do this, this and this?” and that an aunty or uncle said, you know, this was or tell them about the sites they have been to and the dreaming stories that they have heard, so they come back and they’ll say to their parents, and a lot of the parents don’t know it.
E: So is there an education process that’s going, filtering to the parents?

J: To the parents? Yes

E: But its indirect. It’s the consequence of…?

J: Its not a deliberate thing. We encourage parents to participate in the programs but that’s their choice, and often its very difficult for parents, because they often have other children in the family so they can’t sort of drop all those other children to attend the program, but we video a lot on the camps and we make up, each year we’ve made up a video about the camps that year, and the sorts of things and we invite the parents to come to a BBQ and a morning tea at the end of the year to view the video and to discuss what’s happened in the camps that year and what maybe they want to happen in the year coming

E: So from what you’re saying, I mean, cause I’m also aware that there is a lot of lack of knowledge of, or there’s been a silencing of things that have happened, which have impacted upon people and still reverberate and still affect them today, so what you do with these initiatives is kind of addressing those things in a round about way?

J: Its in a roundabout way, but its addressing those things and its giving the kids the cultural knowledge, the language, the……..

E: Like the self respect of where they’ve come from?

J: Yeah, they’re proud. See, part of what’s happened over the years is that, because of what’s happened, Aboriginal people have started to feel that they weren’t as good as someone else, so part of the program is teaching kids, you know, that you’re just as good as anybody else out there.

E: Pride in culture, yeah?

J: Stand up, be proud of who you are, you know….

E: So what you teach is also, is it related to protocol, like, there are protocols?

J: Yes, oh yes.

E: And you teach?

J: Very much are protocols.

E: So its white people. Like kids who are white

J: Yes it is, because we teach non-aboriginal kids about the protocols. If you go and do something, or want to go somewhere, this is what you need to do. Its about teaching
those children and then, if their parents go to take them somewhere, they say, we need to
do this before we go there, and those kids are going to grow up and be the adult leaders
in our communities, whether they are white or black, and those kids, if they know the
protocols, will have a lot less problems as time goes by

E: And it is about non-indigenous kids knowing that…?

J: Its very much about non-indigenous kids knowing

E: So its about country, like how to be in the country

J: We teach things, the kids have to, when we are going off country, if we’re going to
the South Coast, its about those kids contacting the elders, asking permission to go onto
country, right, and to ask the elders to be part of the program. So its not about us doing
everything, its about kids being actively involved in learning as well.

E: Do you find they do it?

J: Yep.

E: And non-indigenous kids too, as well?

J: Yeah. The kids really enjoy it, because it’s about learning, but its different to learning
in a classroom setting. When you’re walking through the bush and somebody’s picking
up, you know, grass and saying to you “Now if you’ve got a mosquito bite, all you have
to do is break this off and rub it”. Even if that’s the only thing they learn on that camp
and come back with, they’ve learned something. Most of the kids learn lots and lots,
they come back with the dreaming stories, they come back with all the things that…

E: They’re telling their mothers, their parents, the dreaming?

J: The parents, the other kids at school, because the places on each camp are limited.
We don’t take any more than 15 kids at a time. Basically because the supervision is a big
responsibility, especially if we’re going near water.

E: What? The fear of drowning?

J: Yeah, well. The department guidelines are pretty strong – if you’re taking kids you
have to have someone that’s got a bronze medallion, you have to have so many kids to
each supervisor, and I think its about, if you’re going towards the ocean, its something
like about 1 adult to every 4 kids.

E: Right. Very strict?

J: They’re very strict guidelines, and we do, because its so important that we work with
the schools and the schools work with us, we follow the Dept of Education guidelines on
these excursions.
E: And do they have teachers who participate?

J: It depends. Sometimes we do, sometimes we don’t. Its not necessarily a hard and fast rule

E: OK

J: If schools want to send teachers, the teachers are more than welcome to attend, but they have to be same sex teachers. So if we’re running a boys camp, they can only be male teachers.

E: So you won’t have a mixed camp?

No.

E: Its boys or girls?

J: Its boys or girls. Its either men’s business or women’s business. These kids are at an age where it shouldn’t be mixed business.

E: OK.

J: And anybody in their right mind wouldn’t take a bunch of teenagers away on a mixed camp.

E: Well, what’s the age group again? Teenagers? So 13?

J: Well, this year we’re aiming towards years 5, 6 and 7

E: OK.

J: So we’ve dropped down – the primary schools have never been part of the program, but we’ve made it, the community has decided that this year they want the focus to be on those 5, 6 and 7. They’re the kids that are more like little sponges, and what we want to be able to do is have some long-term outcomes. We want to be able to follow those kids right through high school and to be able to say at the end of the day you know, its been a worthwhile program because 90% of our kids are staying on till Year 11 and 12.

E: Right.

J: Interestingly enough, our numbers have dramatically improved in Years 10, 11 and 12 since the camps started. There are very, fewer and fewer of the kids are dropping out of school. Now part of that’s because schools are doing things differently, but its also because of the camps and that are doing things differently – teaching kids that being respectful to themselves as well as others is going to improve their school life
E: So like it’s a self-esteem, but its tied into identity as well, pride in culture?

J: Yeah, so its like, you know, I mean our numbers of kids going through the program and the numbers that are remaining at school have significantly increased over the last 3 years, so, you know, it is something that we work closely with schools with. And its not open just to the kids in the public system, it is also open to children within the private system. We’ve taken kids out from Stannies, you know, that have been part of the… because it is important for us to remember that those kids are out there.

E: Yeah

J: In the community as well. And those kids have, sometimes, higher needs than even kids that have got both their parents and not boarding. They are very isolated, so its important for them to be…

E: Because they’re boarding and away from family?

J: Yeah, so its important to keep those kids involved and Stannies have been very supportive..

E: That’s great

J: …of the program.

E: So the country is the important thing, that you are at significant places where there is a connection to land and its teaching about where they are?

J: And its very important that where we go we’ve got good elders that want to be part of the program. It won’t work unless the elders are part of the program.

E: As in the organization of it, before and during?

J: No.

E: Its being there?

J: Its being there, being part of it, teaching the kids. See, the cultural stuff is left entirely to the elders from that area. We contact them prior to and make all the arrangements and they say how many days do you want us to initiate the program for us – it might be one day, it might be two days, could be the whole 4 days. And they, then, they decide on where to take them, what to do and how to do. The only thing we say is that everything has to revolve around the theme of respect and the information the elders out at Bree or the elders on the South Coast or the Central Coast give the kids is no different on respect.

E: So you give them like an introductory…?
J: Yeah, we just sort of. Because we’ve been working well together for quite a few years now, they sort of know. Initially what we did was we talked to them about what the camps were about and we said this, “we would like you to deliver the cultural side of this”, within it, if its possible, we’d like to be able to take the kids out to a couple of sites, and that they chose what it is that they do with the kids, and then we arrive and then they say, “Well, on Monday, on Tuesday, this is what we’re going to do”. So basically we sort of leave it to each country to decide how they’re going to deliver that program.

E: And that works?

J: Now sometimes the elders are too old and too frail to go bushwalking with the kids so they’ll nominate younger people within their community to deliver …. 

E: The walks

J: …..if they’ve decided to do a bush walk and look at bush tucker in the area or something that the elders are getting too old to do now. But that’s their decision on who….

E: They choose to?

J: Yes. And they would only choose someone they believed could give….

E: Appropriate information?

J: Yes

E: OK. Thank you very much, Jill, for your time. I know how busy you are, so…..

J: That’s alright. It’s been fairly quiet this morning.
Elizabeth: I’m at Gloria Roger’s house in Raglan (Bathurst suburb). Gloria what’s your Aboriginal name?

Gloria: Dindima

E: And you’re a Wiradjuri Elder?

G: I am

E: I think we’re going to start...you’re going to read a story of the Creation of...

G: Mount Panorama. Our name for that is Waluu which means ‘to watch over’. This story happened a long, long time ago, and there’s a belief that Mt Panorama is an extinct volcano and this is how this place came to be because before these events happened, it was a flat place. So I’ll start off in Wiradjuri, and Liz would you like to do the interpretation?

E: I’ll do the English?

G: Yeah, how about that, that’ll work?

E: o.k

THE CREATION OF WALUU: MOUNT PANORAMA

Dya Balanda,nganhala dillangu.

In the long time ago, there were two brothers.

Dya wurinyan migaay, guwiiny walanhi marang badambilra ngin nguban

in love with the same girl, she chose, the good hunter for her husband

nganhala mala gaagun wadanganna, guwiiny wulanhi gungula dillang bumala,

that made the older brother very angry, he called his brother to fight.

wadanganna muragai ngindi bumarra gungula dillang bu bunlagi bu marra ngin gungula yinaa.
the angry one wanted to kill his brother and run away to make her his wife.

Bula gibirgun ngaanhi dha muragai cooma dha adelong,
the two men looked at one another and went to a flat place
buwannana dullu dha madhana
to a spear throwing contest using a wooden disc.

Bungu bungu ma°ingu mawambal mil-mil
Many many people gathered to watch.

Muragi dillang yanha-nhi gu gaang gungula dullu
One brother went to fetch his spear
wadanganna gaagung wannana gungula dullu balluna ngin,
the angry brother threw his spear killing him,

Ah gungula dillang bulunhi bu bundinga bula ngurang
as his brother died and fell to the ground
gungula guan yanha-nhi dya ngurang, YA! bangalbuorei ngurang iringa bindyarra
his blood went into the ground, OH! the earth started to tremble and crack

Wirbunba yanhanhi gu nganhala, bu ma.ingu buna-nha gu Wambool
flames of fire came from that place, and the people run away to the river Wambool
Ngana darrambirra!

THEY WERE FRIGHTENED!

Bungu bangu iradhu bu burundang bangalbuorei iringa,
Many many days and nights the earth trembled

Wiiny bu bunnun yanha-nhi bial
Fire and ashes came up high
Nganhala ngurang yanha-nhi bial

don that place came up high

Wadanganna gaagun bunmarra bundinga wiiny ulinga bunnan

The angry brother was killed by hot flying ashes

Maingu wulanhi nganhala ngurang Waluu (Mount Panorama).

The people called that place Waluu (Mount Panorama).

Ngindhugir mil bu mil mil yuggubul maharrin nganna!

You all look and see this fella's body there!

E: o k so this Wiradjuri story is by Guluuriya Rogers, is that how you say it?

G: Yes, Gloria

E: Rogers, Wiradjuri Elder. Well, thankyou for that Gloria. So where did this story, where did you get this story from?

G: This was a story that was told to us when we were kids. The other brother is actually Mt Pleasant. And people say, ‘what happened to the girl?’ The girl actually because she caused a problem in between two brothers by not deciding who she wanted for her husband, had to be punished as well. So she had the little finger of the right hand – the right hand is woman, left hand is man – so she had the little finger of her right hand first joint was chopped off. And that was a sign that she was a woman that couldn’t be trusted because she couldn’t choose to be who was her husband and results was the death of two brothers and warriors. So man would - when they saw that – no man would take her for his wife. So that was her punishment.

E: That was part of the story, this is your record of it, would you say because of how it was told to you when you were a child?

G: Yes, when I was a kid. So that’s one story.

E: So with Mt Pleasant because we’re still fairly new here, where is Mt Pleasant?

G: It’s out – have you heard of the historic house, Abercrombie House? That’s where it is. Yes, that’s where it is there.

E: So if I look it up on the map, I’ll be able to see Mt Pleasant?

G: Yes
E: What I’m interested in seeing is the comparison of how settlement has actually superimposed over these creation stories, which are about country and place, and how non-Indigenous people know about these places in different ways. Like, Jenolan and Abercrombie caves. My interest in this is that you have stories which actually talk about these places, but as how Indigenous people relate to it; in that this is Wiradjuri country...

G: See, we still have our names for places around here. I mean the name ‘Bathurst’ was actually named after some Lord Bathurst over in England somewhere, or something. But, we call – not the actual town Bathurst – but all of the Bathurst Plains, that Batriguu. And that’s all of the Bathurst plains. Our mountain is Waluu and that means ‘to watch over.’ When young fellas used to be causing a problem they’d be sent up to Waluu, get the problem away. And they’d be sent up there to reflect on what they’d done wrong, but also they’d be given a job to do to watch over, to see who was coming into Wiradjuri and who was leaving Wiradjuri. And of course our river is Wambool and that just means ‘meandering water’

E: And the non-indigenous name for Wambool is...?

G: Macquarie River. But we do have people in the community now that do refer to Waluu in the wider community, who refer to Waluu and Wambool. Maybe it’s a sign of respect when they’re talking to me, I don’t know. But it’s good. One of my projects very soon is going to be to have dual naming.

E: Recognised through organisations through the Council, is that what you mean? So they’d be recognized officially?

G: Officially, officially

E: Are you working with the Bathurst Regional Council with this?

G: They’re pretty good fellas. I mean they’re listening, but whether they’re hearing – they’ve got to prove themselves to me.

E: It sounds like this has been a long time...

G: It has, it has been a long process. The senior male elder that – he’s passed on now – was Wirai, John Barg. And he’s been gone a few years now. He wanted these things happening, and I think it’s time it does.

E: There’s a group of people who are pushing it, or are you waiting to see if people are listening?

G: I’m waiting to see if people are listening – there are people there that are willing to come on board to have these, help get these things done.

E: So you’ve got a good support group, people who are supportive?
G: People who have approached and are supportive and have said ‘Gloria, if there’s anything I can do.’ So I’m keeping them informed on how things are going. I want to sing a little Wiradjuri song. This one is just head, shoulders, knees and toes

E: Is this what you do with the children in the school? So you’re invited to come in and give some culture lessons?

G: Yes. And usually Kelso, the little Assumption school in Mida St, down at Tarai Child Care Centre, and also St Philomena’s. But this one is just Head, shoulders, knees and toes. Eyes, ears, mouth and nose. And then you all clap hands together. So here we go...(clapsticks rhythm)
Balang gaanha, bunganbu burami
Bunganbu burami
Bunganbu burami
Balang gaanha bunganbu burami
Dalbirra ngiambalgirri
Second Verse:
Milbu, wuudhabu, murrubu, ngaanbu
Murrubu ngaanbu
Murrubu ngaanbu
Milbu, wuudhabu, muurubu ngaanbu
Dalbirra ngiambalgirri
Which translates as:
Head, shoulders, knees and toes
knees and toes
Head, shoulders, knees and toes
we all beat time together
Second Verse:
Eyes, ears, nose and mouth
Nose and mouth
Nose and mouth
Eyes, ears, nose and mouth
We all beat time together

G: Kids love it

E: And the kids sing along...do they learn it?

G: They learn it, kids pick up things so quickly. There’s another little song here, and it’s one that mother’s would sing over their kids as they were going to sleep of a night, and it’s just... (clapsticks rhythm)

Kind be, do not steal
Do not touch, to which another belongs
Leave all such alone
Kind be, Kind be, Kind be (fading)
And that was just sung, like a lullaby for a kid, and it’s to help them to be good, to grow strong and have good moral values.

E: Were these songs that were taught to you...did you grow up with these songs from your own..?

G: Yes, mainly from old Aunty Ettie. She’d say ‘come here you kids’ or ‘come here girl.’ And you’d sit down and she’d tell you a story...This is another one that she told me, and it’s the Yowie Track. Have you ever heard of the granites?

E: Is this a local area as well?

G: It’s probably about 30 miles from Bathurst out along the Fremantle Road. And this one it’s, down the Wambool River, about 30 miles...and by the road there’s a big deep water hole and it’s really, really deep. And that big deep water hold is known as Johnson’s Hole, who Johnson was I don’t know. And just West of this is a big group of rocks, and they’re called the Granites. You can’t miss them because they’re a very strong feature of the landscape out there. And there’s a number of caves in those rocks. Now, the Wiradjuri people of the area, they call it the Yowie Track.

E: Is that Yowie as in the mythical creature?

G: The big hairy man. We’ve got the big hairy man is the Yowie and the little hairy man who stinks to high heaven is called the Ningari. But the Yowie, that’s one of the places where a family of Yowies were. They call that the Yowie Track and as you approach there, it looks a bit like an ancient highway when you come upon that place.

E: Like it’s a worn track?

G: Yes. So the Yowie, they lived out there in the caves and every night, they used to climb on to the bluff and make their way up the track, then they’d plunge into the deep water hole. And that’s called the Yowie Track out there...I just thought of another story, because when I took my kids out there when they were still only young, we’d come across Wondalali – he’s the Echidna and my kids had never seen one before, so I just remembered a story about Wondalali, and it’s a Wiradjuri story. It's about a cheeky fella – he was a real cheeky fella. And when he’d be out and around, if he saw some pretty girls digging for yams, getting some fruit or looking for birds’ eggs, he’d bob down behind a rock, or a bush, or hide behind a tree and he’d go (wolf whistle). So this upset the girls, and he was doing it a little bit too often, and so the girls decided they’d had enough of him and they went and told their parents, and the parents told the Elders. So the Elders decided once again, to get rid of the problem for a while, gave him a Message Stick and said ‘you go down to the Gundungurra, the Mountain People and tell them that we’re going to have a big meeting when the weather’s warmer.’ And they put marks on the Message Stick so that it’s a reminder of what the message is and the time frame for when the meeting’s going to take place. So when he was going down through Wiradjuri and getting into Gundungurra, just passed Lithgow, he came across some
pretty young things, out gathering food. So, he was still up to his old tricks. He hid behind a tree and when the girls got close, he jumped out and he went (wolf whistle). Well the girls got frightened and run away and anyhow, as he kept getting deeper into Gundungurra country, this is what he’d do: He’d hide from the men, he’d hide from the men, but if he saw a pretty girl this is what he’d do, jump out at them and whistle at them. But because a lot of the Wiradjuri women and girls knew that he was just a cheeky fella, they’d say ‘ah, go away.’ But the Gundungurra women and girls didn’t know him and they didn’t know what to do about it because he was a stranger in their country. He’d also broken law by not sitting down just outside of Gundungurra country, and lighting a fire to let them know there was a stranger coming in, so that Gundungurra people would send someone out to say ‘who are you? What do you want? What’s your business?’ He didn’t do that. So, when some girls went and told their parents and the Elders found out that there was a stranger approaching and that he’d been worrying the women, a party of warriors was gathered together to go and look for him. So the warriors came across him when he was sitting down preparing a meal, and he saw them coming, and he got up and started to run away. Well, the men knew they must have had the right fella, so they started throwing spears at him. Some of the spears stuck into his back, but he kept going. And they chased him nearly all day long. Sometimes the spears would hit their mark, but he kept going. When the sun was going down, they said ‘we’ve chased him long enough. He’ll die, he’ll die of his injuries. We’ll come back tomorrow and find him.’ So they went back to their sitting down place and the next morning they set out again to look for this cheeky fella. When they got to where they thought he would be, they couldn’t find him, but there was drops of blood. So they followed those drops of blood that led up to a cave. And when they approached the cave with these spears ready, they looked in, but all they saw was this funny little creature that they’d never seen before. But, they knew that it must have been Wondayali, because when they approached him, he rolled himself up into a tight little ball, and he whistled (wolf whistle). And that was the beginning, that was the first Wondai – Wondayali. He is the Echidna. So the spears sticking out of his back, that’s his spines (quills). And when he’s scared, he rolls himself up tight, and he gives this little whistle sound.

E: Does the Echidna give a little whistle sound?

G: He does, he does.

E: So the Wondayali is the Echidna

G: That’s how the Echidna came to be

E: And that’s Gundungurra – so that Lithgow going down to

G: nearly down to the Penrith Valley. So he travels through Wiradjuri, down to Gundungurra past Lithgow...that’s another little story.

E: I think having you talk about this, many people including myself, don’t really know what the stories are that belong to the country that we actually are in. So, it’s to me, it’s important that we hear what these stories were before they’ve been superimposed on.
with other stories, like the Jenolan Caves, that’s a very significant place for tourism. But what is the actual story of the caves, how they were created?

G: How they were formed. Well there is a story, some people say it was the Rainbow Snake, but some people say it was a giant fish. And the story, because it’s quite a long one… I’ve got one here. And do you know the Wollondilly River – it finishes up Oberon way. So this is Gurungutj. Some people call him the Rainbow Serpent and some people call him, that he was a giant fish. But he was certainly a Spirit of the water. I like to think that it might have been the Rainbow snake, but I don’t know. So this story: He was laying down at rest down – I really don’t know whether to call him the Rainbow Serpent – that’s my belief that he might have been the Rainbow Serpent because the Rainbow Serpent, the stories of the Rainbow Serpent are right throughout Aboriginal Australia. So, I think I’ll call him the Rainbow Serpent. So he was laying at rest down in the Wollondilly River, and this going right back in the long time ago. And he used to lie there and sun himself near a big water hole, and there was a junction of a meeting of two waters there. And he was beautiful to look at, he was very beautiful to look at because his scales were shining in the sunlight, with the iridescent colors and so that’s why I think it might have been our Rainbow Serpent. Now he had the beautiful violets, and the reds and the blues; the orange, yellows, the greens and the purples, and so he was a very handsome animal. And his eyes shone under the water. Now there was a warrior, and he was a Gundungurra man, and he was called Mirrigan, and he was from the Quoll clan, and the quoll is like the tiger cat; he’s got spots on him. So he was from that clan. And he used to go and fish in this big deep water hole. And sometimes he’d see the eye glistening in the water, and he decided one day that he was going to try and catch him because he’d make a wonderful feast for all of the people. And he’d gain status by doing this. So, he decided that he was going to try and spear this great serpent. So he got all his fishing all ready, and he hardened his fishing spear over a fire, and he bought out his woomera and practiced his aim with his spear. And then down he went to the water hole, and he sent his spear into the body of the great serpent, but try as he might, he couldn’t pull anything out. But all he did manage to pull out was a piece of his flesh. And the big serpent, he uncoiled himself and as he did, he rolled over in the water, and his body was reflected in the sunlight, and he began to slither faster and faster, and he splashed around in the water. And when he rose up out of the water, it was like a big rainbow. Now all this irritated Gurungutj. He didn’t want to be annoyed… trying to get him out of the water. So, he arched his body up and dove deep, deep down into the earth. And this had the effect of pulling all the trees, and the bushes with him. So when that happened, the waters from the water hole filled that track, and that’s now the Wollondilly River. As he made his way north and west, he slithered along, Mirrigan decided to follow him and he decided that he’d go and get some fellas to come and help him, because it was too big a job just for one man, he thought. Now back in these Dreamtime days, the people could change themselves, change their human shapes into animals, or birds or flowers or rocks and so the fellows of his clan were also the spotted cat, the Quoll, and they were all relatives and he asked them to collect some hickory bark and this was soaked in the river, and that makes the water poisonous and any fish will rise up, it stuns them. And they rise up to the top of the water. The little fish became stunned, and they all floated up to the surface. But Gurungutj because he was so big and powerful, it just made him more cranky. So to escape his enemies, he decided to go in a circular route underground.
Now, Gurungutj came across Billagoola and that’s, he’s a black water bird. And he lived at the junction of two waters, the Wollondilly River and the Cox River. So there’s a meeting of two waters there. And Goola,- that is still marked on present day maps as part of the Cox River of Lake Burragarang, and that’s Sydney’s water supply – Lake Burragarang. So that’s part of Sydney’s water supply and it’s a big dam today. But anyhow, back in this time Gurungutj, he pulled more water after him and he continued his journey into the limestone belt of the south, so he’s coming towards Oberon.

Meanwhile Mirrigan and his fellow quoll men, they kept following him and they had pointed sticks and spears. And when they came across evidence of where Gurungutj had been, they’d poke those sticks down. And it was to see the evidence of where he was going. Guruguntj, he went further west, and he slithered along the underground making beautiful crystals in the caves. When you look at these crystals under the light you see his rainbow colors. He met a diver duck (can’t think of the name of the diver duck now), but he also met many other birds and animals along his long journey. Finally, he came to a place and in the people in that area, it was called Djulandu, that’s where we get the name Jenolan. And it was here that Mirrigan and his fellow friends caught up with Gurungutj again, and of course a big fight happened. The shiny rocks where they slipped and slithered around can still be seen, they’re still there. But Gurungutj being as clever as he was, he escaped, and he went back down into the limestone caverns once more. So today if you go through the Grand Arch at Jenolan Caves and the Devil’s Coach house, that’s another one, and look to your left; on the opposite side you’ll see a wall of great rock: This is the ammunition that Mirrigan and the other cat men had stacked up and were going to throw at Gurungutj when he eventually came out again. But the wall of rocks is still there, so it makes you wonder whether Gurungutj is still down there making more caves maybe because he’s a spirit of the water. So that’s the one about Gurungutj.

L: So there is a belief that the land is constantly in motion, it’s just not a static; there are so many caves and that’s it. The land is always going to change and mutate, but it’s the spirits if you like that are forming the changes in the land?

G: We have a saying that Mother Earth...whenever she’s hurt, she’ll heal herself. Mother Earth is sick at the moment and we’re seeing evidence of this by erratic weather patterns, and this is mother nature trying to put things right again. But we’re always calling for more understanding on environmental issues, because this is the only home we have – Mother Earth, we’ve got to look after her. She provides everything we could ever need to be happy and healthy people. So we have a responsibility to look after her. But yes we believe that nothing is ever static, there’s ongoing changes, and who knows, maybe he’s still down there, making changes.

E: So beware, don’t ever take anything for granted

G: Yes, so that’s Gurungutj.

E: Thankyou. I was wanting to know how we relate to the land because we’re living there at the moment – what do you think? Is there a way that you are in country?
G: Because we share our country with so many others these days, we hopefully, we hope that these people are aware of how precious mother earth is. I’ve had times when I’ve had phone calls from people to say ‘Gloria, I’ve found something on my property. It could be like an old axe head, or a grinding stone.’ And they’ll say ‘do you want to come and pick it up?’ And I’ll say ‘no. Leave it where it is. You are now caretaker for that object and for the place you are on. And people respect that, because we don’t believe in taking away from any other area...from any area, because if you take things away, it upsets the balance of the place. So certainly you can pick it up, have a look, put it back.

E: So it’s like an understanding of protocol that there is a lore that is already existing that is important, and if that’s being disturbed, then there’s going to be an impact would you say?

G: An impact, yes. Take for instance Waluu – we share that place with a lot of other people particularly at Racing time. And in years past there’s been some awful things happening at the Mount

E: With the racing crowd, drinking is that what you mean?

G: Yes, all of that. And there’s been occasions when Wiradjuri people have had to go up there and do what we call ‘fix up’ to re-balance the energies there. And because it is such a big job, it usually takes a few of us to do it over a few days.

E: So you actually belong to a group of Elders who are all Wiradjuri?

G: Yes,

E: And living in Bathurst and its environs?

G: No. The Wiradjuri...the central Wiradjuri Council of Elders is a group of Elders that was formed in 1992. And that was a call from Wiradjuri people from their communities, right throughout Wiradjuri land, that they needed to have a group of Elders to represent them for political issues. So, what happened in 1992, I think it was October of 1992 as I remember...they held a big meeting down in Wagga. And lots of people from different communities in Wiradjuri came and endorsed who they wanted to represent to speak and act on their behalf. So out of that there was originally 13 Elders to represent all of Wiradjuri. Now Wiradjuri is a big area. And from there it grew. By the time I was nominated as an Elder in 1994 there was over 20 Elders, I can’t remember quite...today there’s about 26, 27 Wiradjuri Elders on the Council, men and women and they represent Wiradjuri communities more on a political level, than anything else. And the community Elders look after community.

E: So community Elders is different from the Elders...?
G: Well when the Elders go back to their community their still part of that community. It’s just that they have this added responsibility. So it might be 3, 4 times a year – they meet anywhere in Wiradjuri country to discuss issues.

E: It sounds like it might not have the strife that ATSIC that was set up to be a representative body of indigenous voice. But of course it’s been dismantled and there’s been lots of factions, so would you say that what you are doing with the Council of Elders is doing that but it’s been from grassroots and people themselves organizing themselves, rather than being instituted by Government?

G: It comes from the bottom up. Not from the top down and this way we can better service grassroots people. I mean community Elders who can also be on the Wiradjuri Council of Elders and some of us...I prefer more to be...I’m more of a community person – I’m not a political person. But the community...like the grassroots people will take their concerns to their community elders. The community elders if it’s of a political issue will take it to the Council and then it does a boomerang to come back down through. Sometimes we can help, sometimes we can’t because we live under two laws and they can conflict.

E: But is the Wiradjuri Council effective? Do they have some kind of influence, or voice that’s being heard by whoever it is that makes decision/authorities?

G: Decision holders? Yes, being listened to and yes, they have gained respect over a number of years, and we’ve lost some good old fellas, and some good old women over those years. But we do have younger ones coming up. What we do is, we had to lower the age from 60 to be on the Wiradjuri Council of Elders, down to 55 and now it’s down to 50 simply because some people weren’t reaching the age of 60 or 55. But it’s not to say that all people who reach the age of 50 or 55 or 60 do become Elders. Sometimes it’s just that they’re older Aboriginal people.

E: Is there like an initiation of some kind to be recognized as an Elder or how do you cross over from being an older Aboriginal person to being an Elder – is there a right of passage?

G: Well can I tell you a little bit about how I came an Elder, and it’s a bit of a funny story. Back in 1994, they had an Elders meeting here in Bathurst and it was the old TAFE building, down there in Howick St, when that was still operating. And me and two of my cousins, we decided to go and have a sticky beak and see what these old fellas were about. And so we pulled the car up there in Howick St and walked across the lawn, and people – they must have been having a smocko or a tea break or whatever – just sitting around or standing around having a cuppa or a smoke. People from our community, and others as well. And anyway when we walked across the lawn they said, ‘Gloria, the Elders want to talk to you.’ And I thought ‘blimey, what have I done wrong, you know, have I offended somebody, or had I done something wrong.’ Anyway we went in and we sat right up the back, me and my two cousins. And after a couple of minutes everyone else was called in, and I think there was 15 or 16 Elders there – not everyone can get to every Elders meeting – sometimes they’re not well, sometimes they
haven’t got petrol money or money for accommodation ‘cause they weren’t funded. So when the meeting was called to order, they were called to order by the coordinator she called me forward and they all said ‘you’re for it. What you been doing?’ So I was a bit worried, but I faced up to the table, and there were these men and women looking at me and they said ‘Gloria, earlier this morning, before you come, you’re name was put forward for endorsement to come on to the Wiradjuri Council of Elders’ and I thought it was a joke! (laughing). No I didn’t expect...because there were people in the community that did as much as what I did and I got...no someone’s pulling my leg. And I was asked certain questions about my bloodline, because you look at Gloria, you don’t see an Aboriginal woman – very fair skin, no features left and it all went in 4 generations – very quickly. So I was asked about my bloodline. They knew a little bit about what I did in the community from other people that spoke earlier in the morning. I was asked about cultural knowledge. I was asked about spiritual knowledge that I had and then I was asked to leave the room. So Gloria’s standing out there looking over Howick St wondering what the heck’s going on in there. And finally I was called back in, and I just went to go to sit in my seat with my 2 cousins, and they said ‘no, you come and you sit here with us.’ So they’d taken a vote.

E: So no-one’s in charge, it’s a collective, it’s not as though one person is driving...?

G: No-one makes a decision on their own. It’s a collective decision. In an Elders meeting, it’s not just the Elders making a decision either... the community has an input as well.

E: They’re at the meetings and they vote, speak?

G: Yes they’re at the meetings, but they don’t vote, they don’t have voting rights. Only the Elders have voting rights, but the community does have the right to speak and put their voice forward. So that’s how it operates. And that’s how I become an Elder.

E: It sounds like a big responsibility

G: It frightened me so much that for 2 years I’d go along to Elders meetings and, let’s face it, it was a social gathering for me, catching up with people until I was hauled over the coals by one of the old fellas that lived down at Lavington, near Albury and he said to me ‘Gloria, we love to see you come along’ and he said ‘but you’ve got to stop this nonsense about just coming and treating it as just a social occasion.’ He says ‘when are you going to start functioning as an Elder?’ So I said ‘now.’

E: It’s like people take responsibility for others and they speak if they need to?

G: That’s right. Also, another set up within the Council of Elders is what we call younger Elders and they’re like our ‘P’ platers or dogs bodies

E: They keep you in line as a group?
G: No. We train them up. We train them up and we keep an eye on them. If they do anything wrong they’re hauled over the coals. They’re give the test of three. And the Test of Three is you give them a bit of knowledge, you see what they do with it and if they get all puffed up and with their self importance, you chop them off, and that’s their learning finished.

E: And they know what’s going on?

G: They’re told

E: It’s not a secret?

G: No, they’re told and the third test is if they’re willing to share that knowledge with the ones under them.

E: So there’s a line which you’re passing down?

G: Yes

E: And this all started in 1992 and up until then it wasn’t really organized?

G: No

E: I’m talking about settlement actually having disrupted what was here already. So it’s like a re-formation?

G: Re-formation of ...

E: ...how people operated here

G: Yes

E: with lore and...

G: Well, I don’t think they had like a Central Council of Elders. I think it was just community Elders that just came together

E: So it was not something that people were saying....it just happened out of people working and talking?

G: And because certainly we live in different times now with...but because of mainly Native Title I think was a big thing of why the Elders needed to be a group

E: You mean the Wik recognition of traditional owners?

G: Yes. Because we were finding more and more with Native Title being put on by mining companies and things like that we needed to have a voice.
E: These companies needed to talk with representatives of indigenous people where they were operating so it came out of that?

G: Because in some of these mining areas there’s very significant places for us and archaeologists and those sort of people, they take more notice of physical evidence, yes that’s important, but also they don’t realize I don’t think, the significance of story, of song, of sense of place.

E: And do you think that the community elders or Council of Elders educate these people who actually, if they do come and ask...?

G: We try

E: So it’s trying to education, but whether they’re hearing what you’ve got to say, it’s a knowledge thing that they either get or not?

G: You put that very nicely. I mean mining companies are only interested in what’s underneath

E: But if they’re asking for indigenous...it’s only because they have to by law is what you’re saying, because of Native Title

G: That’s right. So they can say on a piece of paper ‘We have negotiated, sat down and talked with Aboriginal people.’ But we come from a different angle. We’re all about preserving and protecting what we’ve got left. There was one particular time when I was working with a Coal mine, with mining Executives and their legal people – hard enough sitting in a room with a group of men and a woman trying to speak to men at a level that they understand. Damn hard job. Trying to get these people to understand that I couldn’t do what they were asking me to do – to prioritise the importance of this place over this place over this place. And so, can’t do that because this place, this place, this place is all part of a network. If you destroy over here, it’s going to have an effect here and here and here like a domino effect. But no, very, very hard. Very hard, but you do what you can but that particular one was quite some years ago. But I must say I am encouraged because there’s people in the wider community now that seem to have more awareness and wanting to know about anything Aboriginal. Aboriginal languages, aboriginal stories, aboriginal spirituality. So there’s a hunger there, what I call the time of awakening...

E: Which you’ve only noticed recently?

G: Over a number of years, but it’s getting more, which is good, because you’ve got the Dreaming, then there was the Nightmare, with all the bad things happening. And this time that I’m going through now, seeing it through my eyes, is the time of Awakening. And it’s just not here, it’s not just here; it’s happening all over. Which is good.
E: So would you say that the Bathurst Indigenous community is in a healthier state than what it has been with...

G: As far as culture?

E: Yes and just how they community work together?

G: Bathurst community is very diverse. We have not many Wiradjuri families left here.

E: So the people who are here have come here from other lands, and whether they even know where they belong, would that be an issue?

G: Most of them know where they belong. Most of them know. See, probably about 30-35 years ago maybe even a bit longer even, there was what they called re-settlement where Aboriginal people were brought in from other communities mainly for education, housing, health, employment, those sorts of things. So, we’re really outnumbered here. Some of those families have been here for over 30 years. Some of them are in quite powerful positions.

E: It sounds like what happens across the board, that certain people come into country which is not theirs and they know that and they do tend to have strong voices, and then you do have frictions...

G: You do have frictions, yes. Sometimes on occasion I still say to people, don’t get me wrong, I like them, they’re doing a good job, both in the Aboriginal community, and in the wider community, but sometimes they do need reminding, listen, you’re just a visitor here.

E: Do they hear that or their rights of being here and therefore they should be considered as community that belong here and have the same rights?

G: Well I’ve had them say to me, ‘I am sorry Gloria, I do apologise, Pull me up when I’m doing something wrong, but...’ you mostly get the ‘but...I’ve had children born on this land I’ve had grandchildren born on this land.’ I said ‘that’s beautiful because they’re Wiradjuri born children, but don’t forget to tell them their links.’

E: That they come from somewhere else and that’s their lineage?

G: Yes.

E: It sounds as though there would be problems that do occur because of this type of...and it’s not just specific because we’ve experienced this wherever we’ve gone in NSW and Qld

G: that’s right

E: Because of the disruption and dislocation that has occurred through invasion
G: Yes, and it’s sad in a way I suppose. But anyway with the communities here, we could have probably up to 300 families, and it fluctuates because people go back home for a while, then come back.

E: It’s interesting with the Census that’s going on now and Jon (partner) is filling it out today saying ‘I must put down that we’re Aboriginal.’ And I’m saying ‘is it really important’ and of course it is because records have to maintained, but how accurate are they because people do move; the endemic thing that occurs with records and attempts made to regulate where people are and how many there are but are they accurate when they come to collecting them?

G: I don’t know. I mean you’ve got people like me, very fair skin, no features left, that choose not to identify as Aboriginal people and they’ve got their reasons for that, you’ve got to respect that, but you know, you know, because you know the families. But you’ve got to respect that, you know people are people.

E: And this is the other thing we come across that you get non-Indigenous people saying ‘she’s quarter caste, or half caste’

G: I hate that

E: And we keep saying ‘identity is something that is very specific to how you feel’ but to have somebody say that, and I think some Aboriginal people have said that about themselves

G: They have, and it’s been said to me ‘Gloria, you don’t look Aboriginal’ and I said ‘yeah, I know.’ And poor bugger me. And I said ‘I’m lucky, and I’m unlucky in that regard.’ Unlucky in that I’ve got no color and features left, but lucky I think, because there was no danger of us kids getting taken away

E: So you were able to maintain culture in a time when it was being disconnected

G: Disconnected. And lucky in the sense because there wasn’t any danger of being taken away, some knowledge was passed on to me. See? So lucky in that way. Unlucky in one way, but lucky in another way. And it’s a joy for me to be able to pass some of this knowledge to the younger ones coming up. See?

E: It sounds like it’s been a good place for you to be in now, because what you’re saying is that there is an Awakening. It might not sound or feel like it with the things that we see, but I think it would be a good place for you to be where you can see something coming together, and a balance being reinstated?

G: Well people’s awareness is certainly growing. And I’m lucky I suppose because I have contact with lots of people in the community, in the aboriginal community. And also in the wider community. Whether it’s from school kids to the blokes in jail. They’re wanting to know.
E: And you do work in jail? You go and do, is it like culture sessions?

G: I’ve worked for many years. Probably 12 to 13 years, between Bathurst, Kirconnel and Lithgow jails. The only jail I refused to go and work at is the one out Oberon way, for the young offenders. They’re too hard.

E: The wardens?

G: No, the kids inside. Much rather work with the older ones. But maybe that’s an age thing too. Maybe it’s a generational thing. But I’ve worked with kids with problems.

E: So is it about culture; you go in with stories, or is it more about counseling and listening to problems?

G: Oh, a bit of everything. When you walk in, you get a feel, you assess, and you find out what they need, and you try.

E: And are you on call or you have a set day?

G: I used to be. But I’m semi-retired now. But just the other day, I was walking out of the newsagent, and I got a job offerered to me delivering Wiradjuri language at the school. I don’t know. I get the old pension now. I’ve got to be careful how much I earn. But the need is there.

E: Learning language being passed on which sounds like what you are doing, language is always a part of it

G: You can’t separate language, identity, culture. It comes as a package. It’s who you are.

E: Do you have a language that keeps growing with what you do and people that you meet, your language keeps developing?

G: well it does. Language is never static. There’s new words, new meanings happening all the time, and it’ll be the same. I mean we’ve got to go back before we come forward. But the ones coming up behind us, they’ll be adding new words.

E: It’s like a rediscovery?

G: Yes.

E: And then they’ll know a word because it comes up somehow.

G: Yes, language is never static. It’s ever changing. But we’ve got to go back before we can come forward with the language.
E: Thank you very much for your time today. I’ll end it here with the interview. So thanks again for your time.
VI. Nyree Raw Transcript

Nyree Reynolds, Visual Artist/Community Arts
Interview recorded at Nyree’s home Blayney NSW
4 August, 2006

E: Hello Nyree – we’ve just spent half an hour talking about things so we might just recap on some of the things. Now, Nyree you’re an artist, an Indigenous... you identify as an Indigenous...?

N: Yes, I do. I’m Gamilaroi.

E: So Blayney is Wiradjuri country?

N: Wiradjuri country

E: Ok. You’ve been an artist for how long?

N: I went to art school in 1964 and 1965 in Cogra. Then when I was having the kids, I didn’t paint... I painted for their projects and that sort of thing which was fun. And then when they got older I started painting professionally, about 1998.

E: Were you always aware that you could paint?

N: Oh, yes, yes.

E: So going to Kogarah TAFE was it?

N: TAFE yes.

E: That’s where it became consolidated in terms of your actual practice as an artist. But up until then...

N: I was just sort of playing around with art. But I studied full time art for 2 years at ... Sydney Art School.

E: So with your paintings, obviously they’re definitely Indigenous works. And you also paint animals?

N: I do

E: So there’s like a spiritual connection with animals?

N: very much
E: so when you do paint there is this understanding...?

N: very much

E: So with the paintings that you do which are Indigenous paintings, that is about your identity?

N: It is. And I link very strongly for some reason with Stolen Generations. And because mum was told to deny her Aboriginality. When we were growing up, we didn’t know that we were Indigenous. My sister’s doing a family tree and she found our Aboriginal ancestor. And that’s when mum said you’re all going to be ashamed of me now. So we said ‘No way.’ Yeah, and she felt...because she’d been brought up to be ashamed of it. She was shunted from pillar to post so that she wouldn’t be taken. So that’s why I can sort of feel for the Stolen Generations kids.

E: So she was part of the Stolen Generations as far as you know?

N: No, no she wasn’t. But she was sent to all various members of her family. In a way she wasn’t wanted. Her mum was ... yeah, didn’t really want her. So she was shunted around and never felt wanted.

E: And do you think there was a reconciliation for herself about these issues when you all came to understanding your identity?

N: Yes she used to say ‘I wish I could really feel good about it’ and yes I think she began to feel good about it.

E: Well that’s good to have come to...

N: Yes always hiding

E: With your work, now you have a grant that you got with Horsham – Weigelli is where I’m going with this...

N: Yes, we got a grant through Regional Arts to do a series of workshops to take paintings to the Awakenings Festival in Horsham and that’s in October. And also they were going to have an exhibition of their works in Bathurst and one down at Boomalli – I’m an artist member of Boomalli, Aboriginal Artists Coop in Leichhardt. So we’re having an exhibition there as well, and that’s for International Day for People with a Disability. So we’re linking groups. We do a group in Blayney, one in Orange. Ken Hutchinson the sculptor. He does a group in Cowra, and then Ken and I work with Weigelli – Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol rehab. So we’re linking all these groups together to form one major exhibition.

E: Would you say that this is under the umbrella of disabilities; of groups that you’re working with who are people who are in projects because they’re in rehabilitation?
N: They have disabilities. And they range from physical to intellectual to mental health, people with mental health issues and drug and alcohol.

E: And because of your own background and your own personal story do you see that there’s a connection with the people you are working with, drug and alcohol and corrective services or wherever they’re coming from. But there is a repercussion or something from people who are trying...like it’s about identity?

N: Yes, because a lot of them say they can’t paint. But my theory is if you want to paint, you can. I don’t think anyone can’t paint and that was incredibly evident down at Weigelli with the Drug and Alcohol mob, because most of them hadn’t painted before, but picked up a paint brush and they were away. And we’ve also found at Orange, people have come there with mental health issues and one girl...her work is just superb.

E: These are all Indigenous people?

N: No, they’re not

E: It’s across the board. It just happens that there’s a group of people...?

N: ...who are Indigenous, that’s it

E: And like with identity, how do you see with the work that they do, does that kind of consolidate things for them? With people who have come from difficulties and then they’re painting and they didn’t know that they could paint?

N: It gives them a lot of self esteem, especially one fellow who was an alcoholic all his life, and now he’s in his 50’s and he’s not drinking and he said, ‘gee, I’m someone now.’ Because he said ‘I was no-one before. I was useless, now I’m an artist

E: So with what you do, it is about culture, because you are doing something within a cultural framework as a visual artist. So it’s what these people are coming to is like a healing, is it something that’s happening through the art?

N: Yes. I think it is. I was tossing around doing an art therapy course and the nurse up at day care said to me ‘but you’re already doing it.’ And it is. Because you meet a group of people who sort of look at you and say ‘oh, what’s she going to do?’ I don’t teach, I facilitate because I don’t like being taught in some ways myself, so I don’t stand and teach. But if someone gets stuck, then I’ll help them in a direction. And to see the people up at even Blayney Day Care blossoming and just going with it.

E: And it’s always the visual art that you’re working, that’s really painting...?

N: Yes, it is

E: And what you’re seeing is people coming to some kind of, like healing...?
N: It’s a healing, like that young fellow I was saying who had been in juvenile justice most of his life and he’s 18, down at Weigelli. His painting was so beautifully child like and showed his inner child...and he was just laughing and going ‘you know, that kangaroo, if you put that in that hammock oh yea.’ And I said ‘do you want me to do a big tummy’ ‘Yea!’ and he said ‘oh, put his arm out and put his tail out’ and by the time we’d finished, this painting was a whole lifestyle. It was a cabin surrounded by gum trees, with a kangaroo in a hammock next to a wheelbarrow full of wood.

E: So the painting actually does mean something to him. So he’s keeping it?

N: Well, he was going to give it to his girlfriend. Anyway, when we were there the other day he said ‘no, I’m going to give it to my aunty’ and I thought, well this is sort of funny because we’re supposed to be doing these paintings to take them to Horsham (laughs). I’m not getting any of them to Horsham.

E: It’s their decision what they actually submit?

N: It is now.

E: And I’m not getting any (laughs)

N: So I’m going to have to take photos of the paintings because ‘that one, that’s for my aunty, that’s for my cousin, and oh, someone else will like that’ which is the Aboriginal thing. They give it away.

E: And do you see that this is something that they will continue to do after the program?

N: Oh, I think so. One of the girls from Lake, yeah she’s gone home with her paintings hoping to start a painting group at Lake Cargelligo. And I said I’d try and get a grant and come up and do some workshops up there. So, I can see most people at Weigelli are going to be taking a bit of an art track.

E: Now with what you do, you’re getting grants to run these projects. Is that how it’s always worked for – now your business is called Caminka Art. Is it an incorporated...?

N: No

E: So it’s a business that you run

N: We turned it into a business because it’s named after our two doggies, Cammie and Inka, so that’s why it’s Caminka. And my son made me a website which is called Caminka, and Simon said if you don’t register it you could lose the name. So that’s another reason why we did that.

E: And you’ve been operating Caminka for a number of years?

N: Yeah, well I’ve had the website up for about 5 years.
E: So that’s as long as you’ve been working with projects and going in as a facilitator?

N: No we formed the Blayney Shire Youth Arts Council in 1999. But I did that on a voluntary basis. And then we got a little tiny CASP grant to do the opening for that. So it’s about 7 years that I’ve been doing Community Art Work.

E: So prior to that it was painting...?

N: Just painting for me.

E: And holding exhibitions?

N: No, I didn’t go into exhibitions until probably 2000.

E: With the Youth Arts Council, that was run thought the Shire?

N: Yes, because I was in Blayney Shire Arts Council. That was a really strong Arts Council for a while. And then so I formed the Blayney Shire Youth Arts Council.

E: And how did that work?

N: I did art workshops after school with the kids. And then we had an exhibition at the end of the year. It was good.

E: Is it still going?

N: No.

E: So it was a certain time that it was flourishing and kids were coming and they were doing things...

N: Yes, and it was also time consuming for me because it was all voluntary. I needed to do something where I could earn some money.

E: Most people have to think about that don’t they?

N: That’s right.

E: After the Youth Arts Council, then you went on to do Caminka

N: Yeah

E: Was it about then that you were looking at applying for grants and then running these programs
N: Trying, yes gosh it took us a while though. We got a CASP grant...because what happened originally, why it started, another reason why I started to do Community Art, they asked me up at the Day Care if I’d do a NAIDOC week thing with the people up there. And then that kicked on from there. We’ve had workshops there. And we got a little tiny CASP grant to start that off. And then we got a grant from Peter Andren. He helped us. And then this year we got this wonderful one

E: This is with the Horsham exhibition with all the different groups.

N: coming together yes.

E: Do you see that this is where you’re going? It is about grants applications and you’ve just put one in

N: for Australia Council.

E: And that one is regarding

N: That’s the Stolen Generations

E: But you’re still participating in that program - Regional Arts NSW is it that’s working with you in getting this exhibition at the Rocks

N: No, that’s totally different. That’s not a grant, that’s just State Records Office invited me to exhibit my paintings at their Stolen Generations Exhibition. Yeah, so that’s just through Link Up. It’s not a grant or anything.

E: But it’s a place where you’re going to be exhibiting and you’re working in with the State Records?

N: Yes.

E: And the Australia Council grant is...?

N: That’s to paint Stolen Generations people. That’s to interview them...because how that came about... that’s been running around in my head for a while. But when I had my solo exhibition, I thought well maybe because I do faceless people, because their faces were taken, as their identities were. And I thought ‘no, now’s the time to really start to paint people and paint their stories. And I want to interview them then paint portraits of them. So that they can actually tell their stories.

E: And this is looking at NSW particularly, narrowing your focus?

N: Very narrow. It’s going to be probably Central West and Blue Mountains. So it’s going to be quite narrow.
E: And it sounds like you’re very well connected. You’ve got people that you’re connected to in Link Up, so there’s not going to be a problem of having trust and people that you can talk to because this is a very difficult area I’m sure.

N: Very difficult. The woman that’s really running with it works for Link Up. Her sister started Link Up. So she’s very much involved. She’d love the grant to happen.

E: And I think you were saying before, that if you didn’t get it this time that you can still submit it. I mean Australia Council has provision that you can continually keep applying

N: Yes, that’s what they said to me. Just the same thing, keep applying

E: The submission itself is quite rigorous. It’s a lot of work put into the submission itself?

N: There will be. But Link Up is going to get some people to come down and show us how to write submissions, so the next submission I put in if I don’t get this one, Link Up is going to help with it.

E: So you did this one yourself

N: I did

E: So perhaps what you’re saying is that you might need to have more professional assistance because the grants application procedure is quite

N: bit different to what I can write

E: I mean it’s interesting. People in your position almost need to have all these multi-skilling

N: I know. That’s what I said to Peter (husband) It’s funny having business because you’ve got to do everything. It’s really tricky

E: And knowing the Grants structures too, knowing what money is available to run the type of thing. Because other than that how are you going to fund what you do because it is about working with people with disabilities, so you’re not looking at a market where people have got money to pay for the services, to pay for you to facilitate and teach and run workshops. I think you’ve chosen an area where people aren’t in that position, they are people that need to be assisted.

N: That’s right. And because we’ve never had much money, I can really empathise with those sort of people too.

E: So to justify what you do, and I know these grants look at measurements, and how you can justify financially what you do, so how does that work? When they’re asking for
indicators of your output and what you’re actually achieve by what you do, how do you address that? Do you just tell stories about people healing

N: I do, I do. And that’s what I did in that grant. I thought I’m just going to say it how it is. If they don’t like it, well then I’ll have to get it done professionally.

E: Professionally in the way it’s about Performance Indicators?

N: That’s exactly right. That’s what I’ll have. And Merv Bishop’s an Aboriginal Photographer who I met the other day, was down there. And he said he’s on a lot of Boards and he said he’ll point me in the direction of how to write the grant properly too.

E: With that view in mind about how to put what you do as a performance and an outcome, and what you actually achieve by the programs which is somehow measureable?

N: It must be because it’s so tricky, because I just haven’t done a grant before. Because this one we got for Regional Arts, Hannah did most of it, and we just put input of what we would do.

E: And do you know other people in your position where they are artists, but they’re community workers, like they work in the community with their art and do you know others?

N: Yes, Ken Hutchinson. He’s a Sculptor. He’s the other artist on this project. He’s like me, he’s got to chase grants and try to get money wherever he can.

E: So how does it impact on what you do?

N: Oh, it takes a heck of a lot of time. Because sometimes - when I was doing paintings because I was selected for Art 06 and Art 05 ...I had to do 14 paintings for that. But I still had to go and do workshops. So, you feel as though you’re pulled in lots of different directions. And sometimes that can be very tiring.

E: Because it is about trying to get money to try and support what you do – I mean that’s what you’re trying to do because you’re not making money in any other way. Unless you were to sell

N: Well Peter’s on the pension. So we’re very lucky that we can have that back up.

E: And with the paintings, do you get to a point where you can sell them

N: Oh yes, I sold 5 down at Art 06. That’s the Affordable Art Show. That’s at the Hordern Pavilion in Sydney. You have to be invited and selected to be there. It’s a lot of galleries that get together. You have to be a gallery to go there. And there’s quite a lot of us. And then you just have your own little gallery space. So that was on in June.
E: So unless you had these opportunities then it’s very difficult to sell art, I would imagine, even though you have exhibitions and I know you’ve exhibited, was it at Milthorpe?

N: Yes, I have. I’ve exhibited, yes I have

E: With a view to perhaps they will be bought?

N: Yes, but what I’m doing now, I’m not selling paintings. I’m going to get prints done. Because a lot of people have said that they can’t afford the paintings and so, rather than lower my price because I know what I can get for them in Sydney and people have paid that, I’m doing prints.

E: So it’s like diversifying?

N: It is

E: working out how to become financially viable in some way...

N: Yes

E: So are you having to work all this out, like how to be more business oriented just on your own resources, trying to work this out through...well I know Hannah RADO, Arts Outwest, that’s what she does. She helps artists to become business...

N: Yes, we have development times with Aboriginal people. We get together, and Hannah organizes those.

E: So this is where you’re getting some ideas on how to structure yourself like a business.

N: Yes

E: And has that been helpful?

N: It has. It has

E: Because it’s a long way before you get a foundation and the business is operating?

N: Yes it’s hard. And it’s really interesting because there was another girl down at Art 06 and me. And we seemed to be the only ones that got on and pushed ourselves out there.

E: And the others were saying ‘we’re artists and we’re not going to think about business people?’

N: Yes, seemed to be.
E: And do you think that’s going to affect the way they operate?

N: Yes, I think so. They’re not getting out there. And I think you need to.

E: What I’m seeing how you are organized and you’ve been quite successful I think in how you’ve been able to expose your work. So you’ve got the website?

N: Yes I’ve got the website

E: And Simon your son...

N: who is an IT Consultant. Yes he has his own business.

E: So that’s been one of the important things...?

N: Without that. That’s what I often say to Simon, and he bought me the computer – he taught me computer skills – so without Simon’s input there’s no way I’d be at the level I’m at now. It took me 2 years to talk him into getting me an Apple Computer. He’s IBM trained. But when I got my wonderful Mac I noticed Si’s name on mine as a Mac user as well.

E: So the website and then the workshops with Hannah Arts Outwest. And what other...?

N: Orange City Council has asked me...I’ve done 2 murals with Orange City Council with the kids, and they’ve employed me to do a third one with the Spring Hill kids. We’ve already done a preliminary’s for that and tomorrow I’m going to be working with the kids in Blayney to design a mural. And I’ve been asked to do workshops with kids at risk, Aboriginal kids at risk in Cowra.

E: So this is all through the Regional Councils?

N: No, this is people who just ring me up. Which is great

E: So they’re organizations?

N: Yes, Orange City Council when they rang me to ask if I’d do the mural I thought ‘well, how did they know about me?’ But someone from Cowra had told them about me

E: Because this is how it works, about people knowing you and passing it on. With these projects, these are paid?

N: Yes. So that’s good. So that helps because that’s often a lump sum which helps.

E: And then you are structured like a business in terms of financials

N: Yes, that’s the tricky part, the bookworks’ the tricky part.
E: And you have to do that too.

N: All that. It’s hard.

E: It sounds like you’re on an upward learning curve, everything is something you’re having to get your head around because as I would see it, we are in changing times, and it is about business and being on top of how you run a project that you can justify in financial terms and it’s not just about being an artist

N: It’s difficult. That’s what’s hard because, and it’s very difficult to put a price on your work too. Because I had $800 on a work down in Sydney and the first night a girl saw it and she said ‘would you take $400?’ And I said ‘no.’ Anyway she finally begged me to sell it for $500 and I said ‘yes.’ And my daughter said ‘that’s bad, that’s really bad business.’ But I said ‘she really wanted it.’ Yes, so it’s hard.

E: Do you think it was a question of a sale as opposed to not having a sale? Or do you think you could have sold it?

N: I could have sold it. Another woman said she was coming back to have another look so I could have sold it but she so wanted it and she was so touched by the Stolen Generations and I heard her say to her girlfriend ‘don’t tell dad what I paid for this!’ So

E: It was too much for her?

N: Too much for her. But she just wanted it. And I knew that it had to go to her.

E: And I think someone that is more business oriented wouldn’t have done it, whereas an artist would see things in a different way?

N: She really wanted it. But then it’s funny; some people were looking at that one with the night sky. And they were looking at it more as a sort of investment. They weren’t touched. And I thought ‘I don’t want you to have it.’

E: They were prepared to pay what you wanted for it, but you could see that they were seeing it as a commodity, like a product? And you said no

N: I just sort of mosied away. I did actually. I thought ‘no I don’t want my girls...’

E: So does that come in to it, like I know with your paintings it is an intuitive thing

N: Oh yes, and they’ve got to go to the right people

E: So this is when you are working in exhibitions and people come up to you, you assess whether your paintings will go there?

N: Because they’ve got to go to the right home.
E: Because the paintings are more than just an artifact?

N: Definitely. Because a woman came to Art 05 last year, she was from Switzerland. And she and her husband were, he was working out here. And she just wanted that painting. And anyway she said – and we took it down to her because she liked the little one, but she wanted a big one. So I did that and we took it down to where they lived and it was bloody big mansion. I couldn’t believe my girls were going to live there. And she took me out, she said ‘I want it on that wall – can you put it on the wall?’ And as soon as I put the girls on the wall she said ‘that’s it!’ And see she was emailing me back and forth saying ‘the girls are well.’ Anyway she sent me an email to say ‘we’re going back to Switzerland’ but she said ‘I just want to tell you the girls will be nice and warm when we’re over there.’ And I sold one down at the Blue Mountains to one of the Councillors and I heard her say ‘come on girls. We’re going home now.’ So that’s the way it affects people. They feel protective.

E: Yes, because it as about the people. Like your people do have faces. I didn’t know your work before when they were faceless. But they do have a personality?

N: Yes, they do

E: And obviously it’s you that’s seeing that. And if people don’t respond

N: Then they’re not getting them

E: It’s interesting, because if you had a business Manager who’d be selling the paintings, they’d just be selling the paintings

N: I know!

E: they wouldn’t be thinking ‘no, I’m not going to sell to you’

N: ‘You’re not having my girls!’ (laughing)

E: So you might end up just being the person that keeps selling them if it’s important to you that you know that they are going to the right places. And that’s important to you?

N: It’s important to me and otherwise they won’t go.

E: So do you see running this business like daunting, because you’re doing everying

N: Yes

E: Because most other people have a Manager

N: Yes, Yes. And Peter can’t because he’s computer illiterate. And so he cleans the house (laughs)
E: But from what you’ve been saying before Peter’s really important?

N: Oh, he’s fabulous at the workshops. He’s brilliant

E: So, he comes along to the workshops that you run.

N: He does all the workshops with me.

E: So you’re facilitating and he is ...

N: He gets fresh water because I hate people having dirty water, because it impacts on their work. So he will see if the water’s not as clean as it should be and he’ll whip it away and put fresh water. He’s just incredibly helpful.

E: He’s not waiting to be asked?

N: Oh he just does it. And he talks to people and especially down at Weigelli – he just talks to people and they – yeah, they talk to him, they feel they can trust him. It’s nice

E: He is important in a way that you wouldn’t be able to measure...

N: Very important

E: Like if you were writing a grant and putting Peter’s input into it would be, how do you measure that?

N: He’s pretty bloody invaluable

E: So without him you’d almost...

N: It’s difficult. Because this one I’m going to do in Broken Hill in a couple of weeks, my girlfriend Sue’s coming up with me. Because I said to Peter ‘very tricky doing it on my own.’

E: With Broken Hill, is that a grant project?

N: Yes, some people emailed me from the Murdy Paaki Aboriginal Corporation. And she said they wanted an artist to just get more enthusiasm in the artists that are up there because they’re doing only Traditional work.

E: Traditional work?

N: Yes. They don’t know too much about mixing color or doing other mediums. And she said ‘we wanted you. You’re our first choice.’ And she said ‘Will you do it? If you will, we’ll put in for a grant.’ And they got the grant. So that’s cool. So we’re going there in about 8 days.
E: That’s quite a big trip for you. And will you be there for a week?

N: No. It’s just one day in Broken Hill and one day in Wilcannia. And they also want me to look at their work to help them with pricing which is going to be tricky.

E: So these are artists. They’re already people that paint, or they see themselves as artists or people interested in painting?

N: They’re part of the CDEP I think. And they run their own gallery in Broken Hill. So it’s a little bit daunting.

E: But because you already have a recognized track record I think, you’re fairly confident having done the things you’ve done...

N: Yes, I am. I don’t get phased too often when I go in.

E: And Peter’s not going with you?

N: No, he can’t because of all our babes, because of all the pets he can’t come.

E: You’re not looking forward to him not being there?

N: It’s going to be ok because Sue is an ex-school teacher so she’s going to help me.

E: So with running these workshops, is it important to have that second person?

N: I think it is otherwise it’s a big work up.

E: So what you do is oversee, and then the other person

N: gets the water. And if someone else wants paper, they’ll give them paper.

E: So with the CDEP they would be doing these paintings, with a view to selling them

N: Yes, I think so

E: they want to set themselves up as a business, is that...?

N: They are a business at the moment apparently. They’ve got their own gallery.

E: I’m trying to get my head around how CDEP transitioning to what they’re supposed to...the government has a new policy they’re supposed to phase after a year

N: Are they? And be a business I think
E: Something like that, so I’m wondering how that’s going to work with you with what they’re doing

N: I don’t know. Because they’ve got their own gallery, but they do all traditional. So I’m going to be taking up things like water color pencils, pastels. So just a whole different art medium.

E: So it is a trial, experimenting things for them to see how they can work with that, and then it will be the one day intensive workshop and then they can see possibly where they can go?

N: Yes

E: And you see that there is a venue for them to develop into profitable thing that they can do something?

N: Very profitable. Yes I’d say so.

E: I think it’s really interesting

N: Yes they’re all Indigenous.

E: Because I think this is where things are moving. People are being encouraged to recognize their artistic skills can be developed into business. Whereas before the push wasn’t there so much. Like you did it as a hobby.

N: That’s right. That’s right

E: But if you want to practice in art of some kind it is about developing it to a point where you are thinking about selling

N: You can exhibit and sell. Yes

E: Do you see that as a good thing? Change that’s happened.

N: Yes, I do.

E: Because up until fairly recently CDEP was just like a holding pen

N: They just got together

E: No expectations

N: Now there will be I think with this...and a lot of people when they paint they haven’t...because I learnt traditional art like I did 2 intensive years at Art School, I know the basics of art. A lot of people don’t. So because I did a workshop up at Condobolin and I was asked to go up there for the same reason. That was CDEP. They
just paint. But they don’t understand the color mix, or the structure or anything. So, it’s more just a traditional way of starting right back from basics.

E: And covering it in a day

N: We’ve done it in a day

E: So what you’re giving them is the skills to actually go ahead

N: Yes

E: and develop those further to what they can do

N: Because at Condobolin, I’ll put out the 3 primary colors and black and white, and then I’ll just say ‘look, just see how many colors you can make.’ And the women were comparing colors ‘Oh God, where did you get that from? Oh I love that one.’ And they didn’t know how many colors you can make just out of those primary colors.

E: You must be inspired and very satisfying do this?

N: I love it. Yes

E: You probably wouldn’t have foreseen when you got into this in ’99 when you came out, to do it.

N: Yes

E: You wouldn’t have seen where you were going to go with this. So it just seems that it’s actually flowering?

N: It’s got a life of it’s own. When we moved to Blayney from the Blue Mountains 20 years ago, I asked Spirit ‘can you put me in a place where it matter that I’m there.’ Because we’ve done workshops too at Lee Hostel, the average was 75 to about 93. I did that for Seniors Week. Most of those people didn’t give themselves permission to paint. And of one woman’s painting she said ‘oh, if my mother could see me, she’d be so angry that I’d be wasting time.’ And I said, ‘no, you’re not wasting time.’ And she’d say ‘I can’t paint.’ ‘You can, you know.’ And so, we turned one of the rooms into a gallery for Seniors Week. And we had very soft lighting, music. We had their paintings up. And they were so proud.

E: Now, you were Ambassador for Seniors Week for

N: for last year and this year

E: Was that part of what you were doing as Ambassador?

N: Yes
E: So you went to the Nursing Homes?

N: Yes up here at Lee Hostel.

E: In your capacity as Ambassador for Seniors Week?

N: Yes. And we had a series of about 5 workshops to develop the work for the exhibition. We got a Seniors Week Grant to do that.

E: This is for you or is this a grant for different people who were involved in it?

N: Just for me

E: Did you apply for that grant?

N: Yes, we did, we did. And there were only 3 grants in the Central West and we got 2 for Blayney, and we think ooh aaah. It’s a whoops, because I did both of them.

E: Well obviously you’re meeting a need I would say

N: Yes, that’s right.

E: So, with the Seniors Week, because you’ve shown me a booklet. And there are people like Jimmy Little and Jack Thompson, are they all Ambassadors?

N: Yes, Henry Szeps and Donny Sutherland, there were 8 of us last year

E: Did you have a meeting at Town Hall

N: Yes, we had the Seniors Week Achievements Awards. And I gave out most of the Achievement Awards. Because I was supposed to be Jimmy Little, because he got lost. So then I had to give the awards out. It was special.

E: And you’re doing it this year as well?

N: We did it, it’s gone.

E: These projects you were doing with the nursing homes, that was as Ambassador for Seniors Week?

N: Yes.

E: It’s amazing how much you’re actually doing.

N: A lot, a lot. It is actually. Then we were asked to do a project with the kids in Cowra. Year before last year Cowra Council cut down some scarred trees which are very sacred
to Wiradjuri people. And the boys from Cowra camped on top of the hill in Cowra to
stop the bulldozers coming to cut them all down. And I was so inspired by those boys.
And then Reconnect or Council in Cowra got me to do a workshop with the Aboriginal
kids- feeling proud about being Aboriginal. And we created a series of banners depicting
the boys on the hill and what the girls, because it was all girls that came to the
workshop, what they wanted to do with that area. So that was a good project.

E: So there were ramifications after the project ended and do you know what actually
happened?

N: Yes, the Cowra Council was fined for cutting down the trees.

E: Are you saying they were scarred or diseased?

N: Scarred, they’ve got the canoe trees and the shield trees

E: Did they actually cut any down

N: They cut 5 down

E: And they were others there that they were going to

N: The boys protected them

E: So they saved them

N: Yes

E: I was talking to Gloria (Wiradjuri Elder) yesterday and we were talking about people
actually looking after land. They’re continuing to protect, it’s not even that; the land has
some significance cleansing when things actually happen on it that shouldn’t, or sullies
it. Do you find that in where you go, because you obviously go to a lot of places with
lots of different communities, so do people still do this, connecting to land?

N: Yes, the boys were great these young fellas. They were probably 16 to about 25 years
old. And they felt they needed to protect them.

E: Is this coming from their own Elders, they’re being taught?

N: I think the boys just thought ‘no way’ and they went up there. And they were
harassed, they were harassed by white kids coming up.

E: But they stood firm.

N: They stood firm the whole of winter.
E: You don’t see these stories. When we hear stories about indigenous things it tends to be the negative side.

N: No, it was so good. And that’s why I wanted to do something to depict these boys. And they’ve now got those banners at Cowra High. And they’re hanging permanently at Cowra High.

E: The banners are the paintings that the kids did?

N: I did some designs, I did the designs of what I thought the kids could do. I made the banners and then the kids painted on the banners (showing designs) This was the protest. I painted that.

E: You’ve got the Aboriginal flag and some tents.

N: Oh, first of all. This was the desecration, that’s the first one. That’s the scarred trees.

E: So they’re canoes that have been dug out.

N: Or that’s the shield, and that’s the canoe tree. Then that’s the protest, the boys camping on the hill. And then this I left as the vision, and the vision; I said to the kids ‘do what you want. That’s a blank canvas.’ And what I did, when I made the banners I bought blue material, and Cowra colored material, sewed it together so I didn’t have to paint it. And then I painted the mountains along. Then I made little flags and little tents.

E: When you say Cowra colors you mean

N: The color of the earth which is a Cowra color.

E: Its quite a burnt orange.

N: Yes, it’s like yellow ochre.

E: And then you’ve got a few trees in the foreground. And then you’ve got the sky. And then the mountains.

N: That’s the mountains outside Cowra. And so the banners were quite big. They’re really big. And I made little flags and I made little tents and then the girls put them where they wanted to put them on that big banner. Then this one I left blank and I know what I would have liked on the hill. I would have liked a Culture Centre. But the girls didn’t. All they did on the banner, they did a little path. And then little sitting symbols. That’s all they wanted, just to be left alone.

E: Are you saying that you visualize what you want, even though it’s not there, so you would have liked to have seen a Culture Centre.

N: I would, but the girls didn’t
E: But the point being, it’s about their vision

N: Yes, it was theirs. I just gave this as an idea of what we could do. And so they were on display for quite a while in Cowra. But now they’re at Cowra High. Then we were asked to work on a project with Aboriginal girls in Year 9 who were dropping out of school. And that was to teach them how to paint their family story. So we went down there 2 afternoons. And created an exhibition with those kids.

E: This is at Cowra

N: Yes, Cowra High.

E: Are you facilitating, or teaching kids or people that you work with how to story tell?

N: Yes

E: So with storytelling, is it like a major focus of what you do.

N: Yes

E: So when you say ‘storytelling’ what do you actually mean?

N: With my story of – I’ll show you after – but my painting I’ve got with my family story. So that’s one of them. And that’s what I said to the girls. ‘That’s the way I paint my family story.’ And so they did – one girl just did Cowra, because that’s her, that’s where she lives, and that’s what she painted. Because I think paintings should have stories.

E: And is it about Identity

N: Yes

E: So it’s family and what they see themselves as

N: Yes

E: So, is it generally about that or...?

N: Yes

E: And this is with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people? It’s across the board, a thing that’s shared?

N: No, it’s mainly Indigenous kids I do that project with

E: The story telling picture or painting that they do
N: It seems to have been

E: Is it intentional?

N: I think it’s just happened. Mmm, which is interesting.

E: So it is something that is needed, otherwise it wouldn’t come out that way?

N: I think it is because with Aboriginal kids a lot of them don’t have pride in their ancestry and this project was to keep pride going in their ancestry. And we get a lot of support from the media too, because Prime Television came down and filmed the girls. So we get a lot of support that way, a lot of media support.

E: Prime?


E: And Peter Andren the local member

N: He’s been great

E: And so there’s part of the wider framework that you do actually have that support or network?

N: Yes, definitely. Oh yes Peter Andren was great. He actually opened the Mural that we did in Orange. Snowing, it was a dreadful day. He came out and opened that. Then we had an exhibition of peoples’ work from Blayney Day Care. It’s a traveling exhibition and we had that, Peter Andren opened that for us in Cowra.

E: So it is important to have recognition of some kind from people in positions of responsibility?

N: I think so

E: It is being recognized for something that you do?

N: Yes, that’s right.

E: I just want to go back to that thing of storytelling and identity. The Stolen Generations seem to connect with your particular interest in wanting to eventually write a book

N: Yes
E: but you are eventually hoping to interview these people who you do want to talk to, and they are from the Stolen Generations. So, the story telling is something about grasping something that’s being taken away, like actualizing it, or making it concrete?

N: Yes it is

E: that by painting something - it’s not tangible possibly until...

N: It’s connecting. It is absolutely connecting because, especially this was evident at Art 06: People would come in and say ‘Oh, I can really feel these paintings.’

E: People who are not necessarily part of the Stolen Generations?

N: Oh god no. It was all white people that bought the paintings.

E: And they’d come in and get a feeling or energy from the work? Is that what your intention is to do with this Stolen Generations thing? Is it to say something to people that it may not be their story...

N: Yes I need to. Because too many people say ‘they should get over it. Why don’t they get over it? Why don’t they get on with it?’ No. People need to know why it’s difficult to get on with it.

E: Like there’s an empathetic, compassionate thing that is possibly....

N: I need to get their stories out. If they’re not able to, I’m going to, hopefully be able to do it. Get it out there.

E: Because my study is looking at identity and culture and without a recognition of something that is Us as Australians, I’m not sure if you see that what you do is part of that, but it seems to be connected to something that isn’t acknowledged and that has happened, and by not saying ‘this is something that needs to be...’

N: Oh definitely because a lot of people will say to me ‘I didn’t know that. Why weren’t we taught about that in school?’ And some people...one girl, actually went away and joined a Reconciliation Group.

E: So it is impacting. I mean there is an understanding that there is this great Australian Silence that happens, that people don’t want to talk about and I think anything that is cutting close to people’s emotions, and I suppose Art cuts across that

N: Yes, yes

E: and it gives a voice I suppose, but in an artistic way. And with what you want to do is writing though, its interviewing – it’s giving a voice

N: It’s interviewing. It’s giving a voice and it’s a visual, it’s giving a painting
E: Because you’ve come from a faceless thing where there’s no...

N: where there’s no faces. Now I want to do faces, I want to make the people real. Because ok, people connect with these little ones that don’t have faces; I want them now to connect with the ones that have faces.

E: So the thing about interviewing and giving the stories is that they are actually being heard; it’s visual

N: It’s real. It’s visual

E: It is something that’s not just hearing or reading or seeing; it’s a feeling thing that you actually get from being touched somehow by these stories, whether they are painted or read, or however you’re going to do it

N: Yes, it’s going to be like a painting of the person, and then their story; with them telling it.

E: It’s an Australia Council grant that you’re applying for?

N: It is

E: If you don’t get it, you’ll just keep applying?

N: I will, but Link Up said that they could possibly help out too, in different fundings.

E: So it will happen?

N: It will happen, just not sure when.

E: So whether it’s this year, or next year or next

N: That’s right. And I might even start doing it anyway

E: Anyway, if you’ve got the time?

N: If I’ve got the time – help yes

E: Because you’ve got the animals too

N: I know, I’ve got lots of babies

E: And when you go to Sydney it would be short trips?

N: Oh yes, just go for the day
E: I don’t know; do you want to say anything else that you see you want to... like a vision you see apart from what we’ve talked about?

N: Well the vision now because we’ve started working with the rehab people, I can see the impact on them more than anyone else that we’ve worked with. Because they can take it away with them. And if it can stop them, or slow them up with their drinking or drugs. And if they can see another avenue out. Because as this girl from Lake (Cagellico) said, ‘I’m going to go home and form a group.’ And she said ‘It stops us from sitting around and doing nothing.’

E: Is it like an empowerment thing?

N: For them? Oh, yes I love that.

E: Like ‘I am something now whereas I didn’t feel that before’?

N: yes

E: And is it tied up with the Aboriginality thing, of recognizing something about Aboriginality, or is it other than that

N: It’s just them. A personal thing for, yes...

E: And art enables that,

N: Yes, it does

E: In being able to see what you can do, and that gives it back to you, that you’re – it’s telling you something about yourself?

N: It is, and I’ll tell you. With the group up at Day Care, I come away exhausted because they drain me. The mob down at the rehab, I come away energized. So different. And I said to Peter, ‘This is incredible. Because I come away energized with them.’ They don’t draw my energy.

E: What is the difference working with Day Care? Do you know exactly what it is?

N: They’re demanding. They’re extremely demanding.

E: So they’re not self resourceful?

N: No, they’re not. Where the mob at Rehab are.

E: They’re looking for a way out maybe?

N: Yes, they’re resourceful.
E: You’re giving them something they can use and move on with it, rather than just needing you to...?

N: Yes. Because up at Day Care they’re intellectually disabled and also yeah intellectually disabled people can be very, very demanding. Physically, disabled people can be demanding. Where the mob at rehab, they’re not. And it’s really interesting too – a lot of people I work with are non-Indigenous but the Indigenous ones because I’m sort of quiet and I paint quietly – they paint quietly. And I don’t teach – I’ll only, if they want help I’ll show them. So I’m not intruding into their creativity because I hate anyone doing that to me. So, where the others at Day Care, they want you to. ‘Do this for me! Do this!’ And so you’ve always got to be drawing.

E: But are they doing it themselves?

N: Yes, a lot of them are, now. Now they are. But the only problem with rehab is I did a portrait of one fella’s wife, so now they all want it. (laughs) I’m doing my third one now. All for nothing.

E: Will that be part of the exhibition?

N: No they’re taking them home! (laughs). I did one fella’s wife, I did one woman’s son, and now I’ve got to do one woman’s kids. I’m thinking ‘yikes!’ (laughs).

E: Do you ever get to the point that you feel that possibly that you are maybe doing too much?

N: Yes

E: And how do you regulate that?

N: It’s hard. It’s hard.

E: Do you have a way of working that out?

N: No. It’s hard, because I’m starting to get tired now and really tired. Because I said to Peter, with all these projects and all these groups, I’ve got to think ‘ok that mob are doing that, they’re doing that.’ And then I’ve got to do my own painting. Then I’ve got to do the book work for the business. And it’s like you’re being pulled in every direction. Gosh it’s a lot. And I am tired.

E: And is there any option to have somebody working with you in some capacity?

N: I don’t think so. No I don’t think so.

E: You’re needing to have to look after them as well?
N: Yes. It is tiring. And now I’ve got to think about the Broken Hill mob, what I’m going to do for that. Then I’m doing workshops at Horsham, so then I’ve got to think ‘well, that Horsham mob need this.’ And so there’s a time where your brain just goes ‘oh god!’

E: It doesn’t sound like it’s about the money. It’s because the needs are there and you’re addressing them.

N: I do. And I love it. I love the fact I get such a buzz when people get a thrill out of what they do.

E: Ok so that’s the passion that keeps you going.

N: Definitely

E: It’s not because you want keep money rolling in

N: No

E: by the work that you get

N: Yes

E: but it’s what you’re getting out of it yourself

N: Yes

E: Right.

N: yes, yes

E: So would you give things up that would be draining?

N: I think I’d have to. I think I’d have to. Oh, yes I have. I’ve given Orange up, because Orange was ohhh, because there’s one woman there, the only woman that I’ve every come across in any of my workshops that said ‘you’re not a very good teacher.’ I said ‘oh, why’s that?’ She said ‘you don’t teach.’ I said ‘that’s right. I don’t’ And she said, ‘well your classes are boring.’ And I eventually said, ‘well, maybe you’re boring.’

E: So it didn’t become the only voice you hear.

N: No, I said ‘well, maybe you’re boring. Maybe you don’t want to be here. So don’t come.’ And she left. But she came back. I thought ‘oh, god.’ (laughs). And then she’d sit there and go ‘oh, this is boring.’ I said to her again, ‘don’t come, please.’ I said ‘my vision of Orange is you’ I said ‘and I don’t want to see it.’ And I thought ‘gee I wouldn’t have said this years ago.’ But now I can.
E: Is that because of what you’ve been doing with your art?

N: yes

E: So it’s given you a voice

N: It’s empowered me

E: because of what you see in your work and it gives you...

N: Yes, I’ve decided I don’t want negative people. And she’s the only one in the whole thing and I thought, she’s there, but so many other people are benefiting.

E: And they strengthen you in some ways that you don...

N: Well that’s what I said to her ‘go away!’

E: I just find people in your position, it’s so easy to get burnt out and drained because there are so many demands that could be put on you because people generally do have needs and once you tap into that, it’s like an abyss, it never ends.

N: Yes. Psychically I have to try and block that energy. And the expectations too. This mural for Blayney Council – he rang me and he said ‘oh, you’d be able to do it in a day won’t you?’ I said ‘what!’ I said ‘I’ve got to talk to the kids and we’ve got to design the mural.’ He said ‘oh well, a couple of days?’ I said ‘no.’ You know, they’ve got no idea.

E: But is it because they’ve got funding in mind?

N: Probably, and they think ‘You can do it in a day.’ ‘No you can’t.’

E: It is about having to speak.

N: And especially when you have kid involvement. Because when I did the workshop with the kids at Spring Street Cottage in Orange, about 30 Aboriginal kids, you’re trying to stop them from painting all over the wall, and you don’t want them to. And then you have really tiny ones that you can’t see and they’re painting away. Oh and it’s wild. So you’ve got to sort of control these little dudes paintings as well. Yes, it’s tricky.

E: Well alright, I might end it there. Thankyou Nyree very much for your time, considering you have so much happening. So thankyou for that.

N: My pleasure.
VII. Ruth Raw Transcript

Ruth Schmid, Community Choir Coordinator
Interview recorded at Ruth’s office Bathurst Information Neighbourhood Centre
14 July, 2005

Recording starts with conversation begun prior to interview starting

R: We are doing radio programs.

E: Oh, who for?

R: International Friends Program 2MCFM. Again, Tere is in there as well. A few people I would say.

E: What are the programs about?

R: International Friends is a rostered program, over 2 nights, 8 people involved who take turns to DJ 1 hour each week, requires a fair bit of commitment. Basically music from your own country eg. Frances (IFG choir) does East Timor, Malaysian other countries. We have got a French lady volunteer who is doing France and Tere Sesofu does Cook Island music and we have a Kurdish man and Chinese volunteers.

E: How long has this program been going on?

R: A few years now, 4 or 5 years. We’ve some of the same people but some have left & others have come in.

E: Are you one of the central people that makes sure it happens and organize who is going to go in?

R: I try to encourage people to be involved and then I am responsible for the roster. There are people who come through the International Friendship Group who decide ‘I like this, I want my own program’. 2 or 3 people have got their own weekly programs now but no longer attend IFG. Some people go direct to the Coordinator who is doing the training and go directly to a program. For those who want to start slowly and perhaps not …[tape problem] future commitment.

Interview starts

E: You are Ruth and I am here at the Bathurst Neighbourhood Centre and today is Thursday, 14 July.

R: Yes, Bastille day.

E: That must mean something.
R: Yes, I just had a phone call this morning actually to say happy Bastille Day. I’m not French but European.

E: You happen to be the

R: Migrant Support Worker.

E: Okay but I am talking to you today about the Friendship Choir. Does it have a proper name?

R: Just call it Friendship Choir because it came out of the International Friendship Group at Bathurst. Some of the members are the same. So we call it Friendship Choir.

E: It’s been going for how long?

R: I don’t really remember about 3 yrs.

E: And you meet fortnightly?

R: Yes, once a fortnight.

E: On a Monday, cause I came to see you one night…

R: No, on a Thursday.

E: So you just meet and sing songs?

R: We talk a lot and sing.

E: So it really is about the ambience, like it’s a friendly group, it’s not about ‘we have to be very good performers’.

R: We’d love to be better performers than we are but we are not perfectionist, no it’s more about friendship and obviously enjoying singing songs together. We try to sing songs from all over the world.

E: Right, so they have to be songs from different parts of the world.

R: We would sing an Australian song occasionally or an English song. That’s fine but not predominantly.

E: So it really is up to the members, the people who come to the Choir, to nominate? Is that how you run the group?

R: Can they nominate the songs?
E: Yes.

R: We encourage everybody to bring in what they’ve got and then we’ll listen and see if we will be able to sing that particular song. We have songs from an Indian lady that used to participate in the choir but I expect her to come back, some Malaysian songs, children songs too because they were simple, A few Japanese songs, French & Dutch rounds. So, yes, whatever the members bought in.

E: Do you need to actually listen to the song on a tape or it can be them knowing a song and then teach the others?

R: Yes, it happens all in different ways. Like some people know the song, haven’t got it written down or a recording of it so they sing it and we listen. There are quite a few people who don’t read music, they actually will learn from listening. Sometimes with the Dutch round we recorded it on cassette and copied it and gave it to everyone so that they could take it home and practice. Also pronunciation is not very easy for some of them to reproduce. We had Dutch speaking people in this instance. We sang an Italian song that everybody liked as it was full of energy because Italian is a fairly phonetic language, they found it quite easy, the same with the Indian Bengali song was easy for them to learn, the pronunciation. We right down words and sometimes people write their own phonetic transcriptions and each one will do that in a different way.
E: It’s up to them how?

R: Yes, now for instance now with the 2 songs we sing there is a Maori fishing song and a Torres Strait Islander fishing song, I’m the one that’s clutching the music and has to look at the notes, and nobody else, they learn that way.

E: By listening to the tape or the person that’s there.

R: Yes.

E: It is interesting with some people from an Asian background and they are having to get their tongue around another language completely different from their own. That must be interesting.

R: It’s interesting and I think that they do a good job. We tried to learn an Asian language, we tried to sing it, a Chinese song at one stage, but we had to give it up. It might have been too fast, it was a very fast song and on top of that the Chinese intonation which we just couldn’t reproduce.

E: You have a Chinese member who is trying to

R: She doesn’t actually, she is Chinese Malaysian, but she doesn’t know how to speak Chinese, but she would be able to speak it best of all.

E: The Group is flexible, you don’t get too caught up, so if it doesn’t
R: If we had some come along the to Group and maybe they found that we didn’t take on their song straight away perhaps, they wanted us to do some difficult songs but we couldn’t do them, they lost patience a bit, they left.

E: It didn’t come out of a range of things discussed but it was something maybe

R: We just don’t know if that’s why they didn’t come back. You can encourage people, if they come that’s great, if they enjoy they will come back, if not then they have other things that are more interesting, different priorities.

E: Any personality problems and dynamics?

R: No. Nobody has any power. I’m the one that is organising things. If somebody brings in a song I will make sure that we can reproduce it. Haichoo does the copying of the cassettes, I do the copying of the words, and I make sure that we’ve got the room and remind people to come along if they need reminding, but nothing else.

E: It’s a friendly idea.

R: Yes.

E: I would imagine that is because you ensure that there isn’t any difficulties that may arise and it really is really bringing it back to what the Group is about?

R: Yes, I think if somebody came along to the group for a while and realised “that’s not what I like” then they just won’t come back, I don’t know how flexible we would be to accommodate someone who wants it to be different, that’s never come up.

E: How would you describe your role? Is it like a coordinating role?

R: Yes, I guess. In the beginning it might have been, actually the idea came from Hai Choo because I was once asked in my role (Migrant Support Worker) by a local community choir, “do you have some people from an international background, from ethnic backgrounds who would like to join in just for a night? I think the torch for the Olympics was coming through Bathurst, there was a real kind of an international effort being made, so I rounded up some people who were interested in joining the choir and even then it became apparent that it was difficult for them to learn with music, so they had to learn with tapes, but out of that came our own little choir, and basically it’s just word of mouth, you encourage people, you tell them about it “you might like to come along” but it’s quite small, I would love it to be bigger and I don’t quite know how to go about it.

E: With someone like Hai Choo, she would be like the 2nd person / assistant so that any type of venture like this really the only person toowy or really very difficult.

R: No.
E: So it tends to be that you do have that person somebody around you that picks up maybe where you can’t be doing it?

R: Yeah.

E: Again with musical background it’s not about having musical training?

R: None of us have. I like to sing. I’m in another choir and some people probably sang in the past, but some didn’t, some actually sing out of tune. I’m not a trained music teacher, I’m not trained at all. It’s a bit difficult for me to improve them, as you said there could be the possibility of doing some workshops in the future together (with me) and that would be a help, because it would teach them techniques which I cannot teach them because I don’t know them myself.

E: With the other group?

R: That’s Allegri Singers.

E: That’s more with music and it’s a little bit more disciplined would you say, structured or is it a little bit more fun where people come together?

R: They can still have fun but it’s certainly, you have to be able to sing in tune and hopefully read music, we perform at concerts, there’s quite a bit of commitment there is required, that you always come to rehearsals, that you have some extra rehearsals before concerts.

E: How often do they meet?

R: Once a week for 2 hours and extra rehearsals when required.

E: If you were to compare the Allegri singers to the Friendship Choir what is the biggest difference?

R: It’s a lot more informal what we have with the Friendship Choir and if not many people turn up then we’ll just have a chat and might even sing a couple of songs, then go home. We don’t have any deadlines, we give the deadlines ourselves but we say we want to sing at this party, then we practice for a particular purpose. We have once we went to Orange and sang with a multicultural group there, so we practiced for that, used songs we already knew and once the International Women’s Day was on and there was an exhibition near the library, we were asked to sing and we decided to go and got one song together, gives a bit of motivation from outside to actually give your best even if your not perfect.

E: So the performance is like a goal that you are going to be doing a song publicly, it’s something to work towards.

R: I think you need a performance occasionally as a goal to work towards.
E: So with your musical training background. Apart from the Allegri singers which

R: No, I can’t sight read, I can read music I know what the notes are called, but I can’t
sight read, I wouldn’t know the interval I’ve got to practice before I know it.

E: With the members would you say that the people are, just picking up another point
that you were talking about before, would you say that the people are feeling a little bit
isolated and

R: Which ones?

E: This is the Friendship Choir. Would there people that would really benefit from being
part of a group activity where they are collaborating in their socializing?

R: That’s definitely correct, yes. That’s whey there is a multicultural friendship group in
Bathurst, so we can actually tell people, this is something that you can join, some people
stay with it for a long time, others use it as a stepping stone to other social groups
perhaps. Because in the Central West, the ethnic groups are not very large, apart from
the Filipinos who socialise a fair bit amongst themselves, there are two groups in
Bathurst. But all the others that we have, social groups and associations, this group takes
care of those who want to do that kind of thing, not everybody wants to be part of it, some
people want to be part of mainstream, they don’t want to come to our parties, to
our meetings, but at least there is the opportunity for them to join in if they wish, but
there still would be people who are isolated out there, you can only help them if they
come to you and want help, you can’t make people do things, they need to come to you
first and ask for it, and then you can offer things that are available, I can help them get
involved but they must it must come from them first I think. We give them as much
information, if there is anybody comes and settles in Bathurst a newcomer, we give them
as much information as we can, if we know they are here. That’s another thing, how do I
know about them, I just have to collect people as I go, other people might tell you about
them, addresses that sort of thing.

E: Do you find that it is a commitment; it’s a commitment of time?

R: For the Choir again?

E: This is for the Friendship Choir?

R: I think so, we try to make it a regular thing and also because the group is so small
each member counts a lot, so if somebody is missing you can really feel it and you feel
dispirited, and then the next time they’re all there and I’m happy again because it’s all
good, but it’s a bit up and down and I think if it were a bit bigger it wouldn’t be so much
up and down for me.

E: You don’t get paid, this is something, it’s extracurricular. It’s not part of the role or
job?
R: It comes out of what I’m doing with my work then it has become a personal thing as well. I’m enjoying it and it’s a commitment from me but also from all the other members. It’s voluntary for everybody.

E: So if you weren’t enjoying it it would be more like why am I doing this. So having the enjoyment part is the thing that keeps you going?

R: Absolutely.

E: In speaking to other Choirs this is something that is quite common, a shared experience that some nights might be just flat and you think it’s too cold?

R: Yes.

E: Then other times next week it just all changes and you think it is worthwhile.

R: Yes. Someone has to know that. One has learnt that there are nights that are down and from experience that it will also get better.

E: Just your musical practice in relation to others, just going back to your musical background. It sounds like that just because you have got the Allegri Singers that gives you a bit of a formal structure, having something musical that you

R: Yes, I’ve got a little keyboard at home, I have to have a keyboard at home to check myself for the Allegri Singers, the very basic things.

E: And you need to rehearse, like you’ve got your songs obviously that’s maintaining your musical training.

R: Yes, its very very basic.

E: Do you think that without having the Allegri Singers that it would be harder with the Friendship Choir? Does it feed into it with you personally?

R: Yes, it does. I feel more confident in saying that “this sounds wrong” because I know what it’s supposed to sound like possibly, it helps.

E: I think I was reading somewhere that the Allegri Singers, did that come out of the Sweet Adelines or is that another group? Do you know Sweet Adelines, they were in Bathurst?

R: Totally different groups because as far as I know Sweet Adelines are an international set up where people sing certain types of songs. No the Allegri Singers came out of the University.

E: CSU?
R: I’m not quite sure, because the music lecturer was at that time and for a long time until recently, was also the Director of the Bathurst Conservatorium, and also was the Conductor of the Community choir.

E: So there is another community choir?

R: The Allegri Singers is the Bathurst Community Choir.

E: Is that still a community choir?

R: Yes, they call it a community choir, people can come but they would have to audition.

E: It’s the Director or the group who decides on who joins.

R: The Director.

E: Is it Max Reeder?

R: Not any more it is now Kerry Davis.

E: But it was Max Reeder?

R: Yes. Max did it on a voluntary basis because he was a lecturer at CSU, most lecturers have that commitment. They have to have a voluntary community activity, that was his choice, but now we have somebody that we pay.

E: So he wasn’t’ paid and now this Kerry Davis she is paid?

R: By the choir.

E: How many members are in the Allegri Singers?

R: We have less than 20, there were over 30 before.

E: What’s happened?

R: It’s an aging choir and then some people have moved away, but also some people when Max left went, they took it as a chance for them to leave, but it’s certainly aging, there are not too many young people.

E: So are they advertising for new people?

R: Every now and then they advertise for new members.

E: Do people turn up?
R: Yeah, sometimes.

E: As long as they pass the audition…

R: I don’t know what Kerry has done, or what the audition consists of.

R: If someone is totally unsuitable they would be told and asked not to come back by the Director.

E: So the group doesn’t really say they don’t want this person?

R: Oh no, it’s purely from a musical point of view that decision would be made. I don’t think (Kerry) had to do that, Max may have had to do it in all the years that he’s been the Director, but I think if people are feeling out of their depth they would soon realize and probably not come back.

E: It sounds like a really great opportunity that you’re offering that it can be anybody; it’s not about really having to have musical brilliance. Just come and sing.

R: I’m sure there are some other choirs in between. We’re at the bottom in the sense of musicality and music knowledge and ability, there would be quite a range there.

E: I’m not sure if this is relevant but you come from Germany?

R: No, Switzerland.

E: So as a child did you learn piano or…

R: No, I didn’t learn piano, I learnt the recorder and at some stage I learnt the piano accordion because my father didn’t want piano so this was like a compromise, kind of crazy when I think back but anyway…

E: Music was always something you were brought up with?

R: There was a bit of music, but we were not really a musical family.

E: So it’s your choice?

R: My younger sister is fairly musical, she plays the recorder really well and another sister now too is into recorder playing, my brother curiously never learnt to play an instrument, but at school we had singing always and I liked singing. I remember at home we used to sing amongst ourselves, just singing rounds.

E: When at home?
R: When we were washing up, I remember there was a time we would sing together as children, I can’t remember when it was that it stopped, I can’t quite recall when it happened.

E: So when you say you weren’t a musical family you mean your parents weren’t the type who said you have to do music?

R: My parents never learnt an instrument and going to concerts, it’s really us who went to concerts, or sometimes I would give them a ticket and say “go to a concert!”

E: So there really wasn’t anything in your childhood that was very specifically about music. It was just you knowing you wanted to have music somewhere.

R: Yes, definitely. Music was important to me not necessarily as an active musician but certainly as a listener definitely, I remember when I bought my first record. I used to listen to the radio a fair bit and I remember when we bought our first record player that was just fantastic and you could actually buy music and listen to it whenever you wanted to, that sort of thing.

E: You weren’t obviously discouraged by your parents?

R: No, we weren’t directed too much in one direction or another, we did it but weren’t stopped with lots of things actually that was the case which is quite interesting thinking back.

E: So there wasn’t anybody pushing or driving, it’s you making the choices. When you came to Australia and therefore you just fell into it because it was something that you chose, an activity you looked for to say ‘I want to part of the singers?’

R: It’s taken me a long time becoming a member of the Allegri singers, because I didn’t really think I could sing very well, not that I think now that I sing very well but that I can actually do it. It was somebody who came here as a visiting Director who was from Hungary, she was a Koday trained choral teacher, she was the uni (CSU) for a certain time and she said “Ruth, you’ve got to come!” thinking because I was from Europe too that I would probably be musically trained or interested so it took me a long time before I did eventually join up.

E: Because of her?

R: Yes.

E: It just seems that because of your experience that you understand what it’s like for people that probably don’t have the confidence to say ‘I’m just going to join this group’, especially with singing.

R: A lot of people, when I say “you can join our multicultural choir” say “but I can’t sing” I say “you don’t have to be able to sing. That’s the type of choir it is”.

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E: Do you find that they do somehow find their voice, I’m talking psychologically, something empowering happens?

R: I think so, with some it’s more apparent than others.

E: In what way?

R: I just noticed to say for instance with Tere, she’s obviously got a natural talent, but maybe she didn’t have the opportunity apart from home in the Cook Islands, she said “our choir used to sing for the Queen when she came and visited” that sort of thing; she harmonises naturally. I don’t even have to say ‘oh you’re not in tune’. Since she’s been here in Australia she hasn’t had the chance to sing and maybe this friendly atmosphere is what she likes about it.

E: So she has come out in ways in terms of being confident in other ways?

R: Yep, she has because she is now also doing the radio?

E: Like a disc jockey?

R: Programming – International Friends – for her definitely I can see that it’s done a lot, or maybe a combination of the two.

E: With the others it is more subtle.

R: Also, she has started to teach her children and other children to dance and other children to dance because one of the songs involved dancing and then out of that followed that she’s teaching children to dance and they perform every time.

E: Children you mean other children who come to her or her own children?

R: Her own children and other children from 2 or 3 different families.

E: Are they Cook Island people?

R: No, one is an Aboriginal girl, a couple of other Solomon Island kids and the others are Anglo Australians.

E: And she’s teaching them traditional?

R: Yeah.

E: Cook Island dance, Polynesian dance.

R: Yeah.

E: That’s amazing. It must be great for you to see.
R: For me she is the most obvious example of the IFG choir impact. Haichoo is an academic and she’s very active, well liked by people, she doesn’t need the choir but she likes it and it’s good to have her there. She’s an equalising person for me personally and for groups as well. Judy is Australian but she has got both her sons have married into multicultural families so she has got that interest and she just enjoys the company.

E: Apart from the enjoyment factor would that be motivation for you that people who come to the Choir will somehow gain something for themselves personally in their lives in terms of just maybe getting out of something that might be difficult for them and moving on?

R: It’s not my prime reason, but if it’s something that comes out of it, then I would be very happy.

E: The prime reason is the joy, that you enjoy it. You are sharing with other people. My guess is that the Allegri Singers wouldn’t have too many people from non-English speaking backgrounds?

R: No.

E: None?

R: None. Maybe only one I think.

E: So what does that say? It would be interesting to know.

R: I don’t want to make any judgments. It’s very European/Western oriented, very western.

E: The repertoire is what classical?

R: Classical and every now and then maybe some musicals, but western ones as well.

E: You mean in English?

R: Also where it comes from.

E: Classical tradition and that you might sing in Italian, French and German?

R: Yes, we may sing in Latin, Italian, German, and French but within the Western.

E: Not folk?

R: Yes.
E: It’s not a judgment but I’m thinking people who do come from other countries that are non-English speaking backgrounds would, I imagine, be difficult for those people to approach an established group thinking ‘I’m just not good enough.’

R: Yeah.

E: It’s not a judgment on the group.

R: It’s just the kind of choir that is, it’s not the kind of choir that these people would feel comfortably with necessarily because maybe they have no music training, but on the other hand they may have musical traditions that are aural which may be very strong.

E: And the culture is very different from what you’re saying is a Western.

R: It could be different. I mean. There’s people who come from different cultures, it’s very hard to throw them into the same basket. There are over 45 different cultures of non-English speaking backgrounds in Bathurst. Sometimes you may just find 1 or 2 people from a particular background, and sometimes you find larger groups.

E: Who tend to socialize in their own group?

R: Some do some don’t.

E: They may or may not socialize in their respective cultural groups.

R: It depends on whether they have come to Australia to get away from old tensions and integrate in a new life here.

R: Like some older migrants would say that they are part of mainstream.

E: Do you find that there are others that are radically opposed to being assimilated that they want to retain a sense of their own identity?

R: No, I haven’t come across that. Certainly there are people who want to maintain and want to ensure that their children maintain, part of their culture, but they also realise they live here and go to school here and live in this society. I haven’t come across anyone really who has problems, because that would create problems.

E: It doesn’t happen in this town.

R: It can happen when it is sort of, I can think of one family, but I can’t mention them. Maybe for Muslim families in some instances where their belief and practice is fairly conservative and traditional, it can possibly come to problems in the sense how their children when they grow up react to their parents if they see how everything is done elsewhere out in society and all their school friends are living in a different way, that could cause problems. But in Bathurst I haven’t really come across it, but I know it exists in the Metropolitan areas, there have been some issues which have been taken up
because they happen so frequently, service providers try to deal with them in an appropriate way.

E: This is your connection in your role as Migrant Support Worker that you would be aware of what goes on outside of this regional district?

R: Yeah, I wouldn’t know everything but you pick it up and you are sometimes involved in State meetings, or where you get sent papers and reports and you pick up from there, this is an issue for that particular area, so that’s what they do, but it wouldn’t apply necessarily here.

E: My assessment of Bathurst and central west is it is quite cohesive in terms of, there doesn’t seem to be racial tensions that may be seen

R: Not open, not that I’m aware of, some people have experienced racial discrimination in the sense of what people might have said to them, but it’s not systemic.

E: I think on the other side of the coin is that you don’t necessarily see an ethnic face in publicly and loudly in positions of power. So if you are to go to the Council you are less likely to see people from an ethnic background. There is two sides, there is one that is a cohesiveness and harmonious in the community but on the other side there is

R: It hasn’t been tested.

E: People come here as you say they come here to be part of the Australian culture, not to put a stamp on who they are and that they come from a different way of seeing things maybe?

R: Yes, possibly. If they come to live in a country town they must know that there is not that same sort of social networking that happens in a Metropolitan area where you’ve got several groups of the same background, where you have a ready made social network for you, so if you come to a country town, I guess you would try and fit in a bit more, become part of the wider community.

E: With this social network it may happen in the Metropolitan area. It’s not really happening here for whatever reason but there is the multicultural centre that people can join if they want to part of something?

R: Yeah. Oh well no, there is just a multicultural group.

E: Group, and they meet?

R: We meet once a month, but that’s sort of a committee meeting, but anybody can come, I mean everybody is welcome.

E: It’s not really lobbying it’s just a place that people wanting
R: Some of the people in that committee, they may have interest in a wider sense on multicultural issues, like for instance one member from the IFG in Bathurst and another member from the multicultural group in Orange, they are now members of the original Advisory Council for the Community Relations Commission which is a state body that looks after the welfare of migrants, so they are interested in having a voice and being able to speak not on their personal behalf but on what they consider to be some of the issues that affect migrants, so that’s good because then I’m not the only one always speaking for others. It becomes a bit like my thing I’m not speaking on my behalf, I’m always feeling like I’m speaking on somebody else’s behalf, but not everybody wants to speak and not everybody can.

E: It’s more the people that can’t maybe because they don’t have the confidence.

R: Yeah.
R: That’s a start if we have representation on these bodies.

E: So this choir would be meeting some kind of a need in that way. It’s a voice for people that may just be?

R: I don’t know. I’m not sure about that because I think it means something different to each member. It’s not like the Filipino choir, because recently there was a Filipino choir here from Canberra, I think the Church might have organised it, I didn’t know about it until after otherwise I would have gone to listen, that would have been quite moving, rousing I don’t know, so that’s a different thing. I think our choir is really more of a social group and to be that social group, the reason for us to be together might be the singing.

E: Right, it’s no other reason.

R: If you just come together and talk, drinking coffee – you have to have a reason for being there together, it might be to sing.

E: Now with payment. Do people actually pay for anything?

R: No.

E: So it’s completely free?

R: I think they might pay for a cassette, because it’s cost me, but no other fees.

E: It’s not really an issue or anything like that?

R: No. I don’t think money would ever be an issue. Whatever music we have we write down or have it on recording.

E: It’s a shared [overtalk] So there is no problems regarding money because it’s not an issue.
R: No, like for instance if we had a workshop, then of course I would expect the members to pay something, if you have a professional to come and teach you something, then I would ask them to pay to contribute something, it’s not an issue.

E: You are getting the rooms?

R: For nothing, through the neighbourhood centre, so it’s good for them to have me there, because I can get the room. For instance Tere does a lot of her dancing practice in these rooms (at the Neighbourhood Centre) on a night when it’s available because she finds that kids behave differently if they’re in a different place than home, there’s no TV. We benefit through the connection with BINC.

E: So the neighbourhood centre is very important.

R: Yes.

E: Who funds the BINC here?

R: Well, the Bathurst Information and Neighbourhood Centre Coordinator is funded for Department of Community Services, but then we have a whole range of different projects. They may be funded by all sorts of different government departments Federal, State. I’m funded by the Immigration Department; other people are funded by the Department for Aging and Disability.

E: So is there a community that administers this particular centre and they run

R: Management committee who are all volunteers and we have a very good one, it’s one of the best. I’m in touch with other workers and some have such crummy management committees, we’ve got a fantastic one and that’s partly because Pat our Coordinator she always makes sure to rope in some really capable people like for instance if somebody retires, she thinks “oh, they might be a good person with a particular skill who might be interested as a volunteer for the Management Committee. It’s worked for quite a long time. It’s always been good.

E: There seems to be something about Bathurst that has a positive energy.

R: Some people feel it’s hard to get into.

E: Bathurst socially?

R: Yep, it probably depends on what your expectations are.

E: I think with something like this, as you say, it is a little bit uncommon in terms of people actually working together to have different services funded by different government.
R: There are quite a few centres or similar centres are doing that because that’s a way of being able to fund. We have to contribute financially towards the running of the Centre otherwise it wouldn’t be able to exist the way it does. The more grant money comes in, the bigger the portion to be used in running the centre to make it nice.

E: So you really have to collaborate, there has to be a sense of collaboration?

R: Yes.

E: It’s about service, not about one overriding the other. I know some neighbourhood centres are just tiny little houses in the back of some street and you don’t even know they’re there.

R: I give you a brochure. Some run different services, they get funding from different sources, some might only run 2 or 3 more services than just themselves and others are bigger, but I think there comes a point where you shouldn’t grow much more.

E: Because you lose the focus of what you’re doing?

R: Yeah.

E: I think I have got what do you get out of this music-making community activity? It sounds like it is mostly about enjoyment and that’s about it.

R: About company and meeting friends.

E: Probably for people who don’t come to the mainstream have got different backgrounds that maybe you understand.

R: Yeah. It’s open, where there are no particular expectations, or be a certain type of person, or a certain background. You know one’s an academic, another is an academic, Tere doesn’t necessarily have training skills but she has lots of other skills. I guess it’s because we are so different then we have something in common.

E: I’m just going to have a look at this performance that you are going to do. The next thing that you’ve got coming up – is that the Mid-year IFG party coming up 3 July, 2005?

R: It’s a bit of entertainment. I’ve got about 8 or 9 different pieces of entertainment that will perform, belly dancers, other musicians, our little choir will sing, couple of people will do a circus acts, all home grown.

E: And are people from the multicultural group?

R: Yep.

E: So they’re all the people that would be the acts performing.
R: Not necessarily. For instance the belly dancers are not part of the IFG we just know them. They are a group of locals who learn belly dancing; it gives them a chance to perform to an audience too. Not professionals, we don’t pay any of the performers. Some of them are from the multicultural group. When I say the Multicultural group it’s the committee and everybody makes decision like people are invited to join committee but a lot of people are not interested, they just like to come to our parties, so they’re in the bigger multicultural group, the Committee organises it, but the people that will be there will be many more hopefully.

*Tape ends*
VIII. Tere Raw Transcript

Tere Sosefu, Children’s Polynesian Dance Teacher
Interview conducted at Bathurst Neighbourhood Information Centre
20 July 2005

E: I’m starting the interview. So I’m with Tere?

T: Sosefu

E: Sosefu, and you live in?

T: Kelso

E: And I’m actually in Bathurst at the Bathurst Information Neighbourhood Centre.

T: Yes.

E: Now, Tere goes to the International Friendship Group which Ruth Schmid runs, she puts it together.

T: You mean the choir?

E: Yes

T: Yes, she does. International choir.

E: International choir, okay. How long have you been going to the choir?

T: Since the start of 2002 I think it was [inaudible]

E: Yeah, it gives me an idea, it’s not yesterday.

T: Yes.

E: It’s been around for a couple of years and you’ve been one of the founding people?

T: Yes.

E: So there’s other people that have turned up and…

T: Come and go

E: So what keeps you…
T: I love singing. I tried to get into the other choirs that are based in Bathurst, but it costs money to join.

E: How much was it to join?

T: Well an hour and a half is $7:00 but to be a membership I think it’s $50:00. Depends

E: A year, it’s an annual membership?

T: I need the money so I couldn’t join, and then when they said they were doing to a choir for the International Group, I said “cool, I’m going to join that!”

E: Okay and with the other choirs which are bit expensive were they community choirs or conservatorium choirs or conservatorium choirs or…?

T: Conservatory, community, the church

E: All of them you had to pay

T: You had to pay to join.

E: Okay, so this one worked out well.

T: This one is free.

E: So is it about the songs too, like the type of songs that you learn. Is it about that or…

T: Oh, not so much for the songs but more about coming out to meet people and sing your heart out, you know.

T: Because somebody else would copyright it.

E: That’s the reason why. So really it is something that is handed down.

T: To generation after generation. Even the singers don’t write the lyrics down or whatever, it’s in there (motions to body).

E: Is it always done exactly the same?

T: No.

E: So it changes.
T: It changes all the time.

E: Because the singer maybe says it in a different way or does it differently?
T: It’s the same melody but the words are, it’s the same words but the tune you know melody sometimes is a bit faster, but we’re not allowed to put the music down on music sheets.

E: Okay, so the songs that you’ve taught the International Friendship Group you wrote the words down?

T: I’ve written the words and taught them the melody.

E: So that worked?

T: Yes that’s worked but they keep telling me “can we have the music sheets” and I say “I’m sorry, you can make up your own sheets” but the thing is they can’t follow the music. I said “it’s been taught to us for years and years, through the years.

E: So do you sing in harmony?

T: Yes

E: It’s a harmony thing? That’s because of the church? Singing is in harmony?

T: We can harmonise when we sing.

E: Is it what you taught the International Friendship Group?

T: Sometimes I harmonise with them and there’s only a few of us, maybe 8 or so and I’ll be harmonising, and they say “there goes Tere”.

E: So it’s more you that you feel it? You go with it rather than just saying this is how it’s been taught.

T: I just follow whatever they… I can listen to somebody and then just harmonise behind them and back them up. I can do that.

E: So with the International Friendship Group, what I’m interested in is what other things that have influenced you as a result of being a part of that group? I mean has it kind of opened up different things for you to do maybe in the community or…

T: Like what? Music kind of thing or…

E: Anything. It doesn’t have to be musical. So for instance do you host a program on…

T: Yes, I’m on 2MCEFM.

E: Which is Bathurst CSU?

T: Yes, I was on Monday night, because we’re rostered.
E: Right, I want to talk about that but did that come out of being part of that group?

T: Yes. Because she was asking everybody “do you want to be in it?”

E: Who Ruth asked?

T: But I was the one that was asked… because when I first came to Bathurst, there was another Cook Island lady but she lives in Orange and I heard her on the radio and I thought “that name sounds familiar” and I asked Ruth and she said “yes, she’s a Cook Islander” because I heard her talking Cook Island and I thought “I didn’t know there was another Cook Islander in the area” so I wanted to do it and I asked Ruth and she said “yeah” and she kept saying “yes, yes” and I said “Ruth, I’m still waiting” but the thing was we needed 6 people to do the Course.

E: So you actually had to participate in the course?

T: You had to do the course first before you go on the radio.

E: Who ran the course? CSU?

T: Yeah.

E: Okay and you learnt to what, broadcasting techniques?

T: Yeah, how to do interview and all that. I think we had 8 weeks to do that and then another 8 weeks you would try to get on the radio but you had to go with a buddy with someone who knows what they’re doing.

T: It took a while, it was scary.

E: So how long have you been doing it?

T: About 4 years now.

E: 4 years? You must be an old hand at it now

T: I love it.

E: So it’s Monday nights.

T: It depends because we are on Monday and Tuesday with International so sometimes I’m rostered on Monday, sometimes on Tuesday; if some of our crowd has gone away on holiday they’ll just ring me.

E: Your crowd is this group?
T: The International Group. There are 8 of us rostered over Monday and Tuesday, so if some go away, there’s always a back up.

E: So there are all different nationalities.

T: Yes. There’s a Japanese, French, Swedish, there’s a few of us there. So every time whoever comes on, they do their thing, so when I go on, I do the Cook Island one.

E: You bring your own CD’s?

T: They’ve got their own

E: Cook Island CDs?

T: Yes and I’ve got my own.

E: So you speak in Cook Island language.

T: Yes, sometimes. Most of the time I just sit there and say things in English.

E: So is this a voluntary thing? It’s not paid? So it’s completely up to you?

T: Yes, I quite enjoy it, yes I quite enjoy it.

E: So, the other thing that I understand that you are doing is the performing group. So you’ve got a children’s group and you’re teaching them the Cook Island dances?

T: I’m teaching them Cook Island dances, the hula hula.

E: So is it singing and dancing or…

T: Just dancing.

E: Right so you have play a CD?

T: A CD player, they dance and I explain while I’m teaching them, I explain what they are dancing about.

E: So always the dances mean what the song is being danced to?

T: You have to represent the song in the dance. When you’re dancing you have to present yourself, and present the song and you have to tell people what you are dancing, you’re not there, just throwing your hands around and I try to explain to them how to present it with the hands.

E: So you are teaching them moves? Teaching them traditional moves?
T: Yes.

E: It’s quite challenging?
T: Yes, because they’re not Cook Islanders.

E: So how many are in the group?
T: I’ve got 6 girls and 4 boys.

E: And their ages are between?
T: They’re aged between 12 and the youngest one is 3.

E: Oh 3 that’s tiny. She would be easy to teach because they are little and absorbent.
T: As long as you let them do their own thing, they’re quite happy.

E: You have your son who is 10. Other than your son are there any Cook Islanders?
T: No. Just my son and myself and the rest, 3 from Vanuatu, 1 from Fiji, 1 of the boys is New Zealand Maori, and 3 Australian.

E: Has that been going on for a long time as well?
T: For about 2 years now.
E: And that means you come into here Bathurst Information Neighbourhood Centre to rehearse every week?
T: We practice once a week.

E: And then you do a performance?
T: When we are in my Church I sometimes ask Ruth if she knows somebody that wants the kids to perform and I’ve got a few friends who have functions and they invite the kids.

E: So is it important to have them perform so that they’ve got something?
T: Yes. When I first got the kids to perform they were so scared and they didn’t want to dance and were so nervous, but now they just love it.

E: They show off?
T: They just go there and do their thing with no care in the world, and I thought “wow” when we first started they would say “please don’t make me go!” so I said “just go and do whatever” and I think because every time they dance people are so enthusiastic, they sit and they watch and they said “they were watching us?! Did you see that? They were
watching me!” and it grew from there you know; they know now that every time they go and dance, people will be looking at them

E: Yes, so people are interested in them?

T: Yes and when we danced at the park for Australia Day. I was shocked. There were so many people. They were saying “when are we going on, when are we going on?” I said “there’s a lot of people here”, because most of the functions we go to there are 30 or 40 people, but this one in the park was hundreds of people and they just went up there and did their thing, no problem in the world. I sat there and I was shocked!

E: Were you shocked at them not at the audience?

T: I was shocked at them because they just go up there and did their thing and were quite happy, smiling; they did everything well and when they came off I said “I am so amazed with you!” because none of them went “there are so many people here and I’m not doing it” no, they just went up there and had fun and just danced.

E: So really they’ve grown.

T: They’ve grown and they’re really confident now, every time we do something, they just go out there and they know that people will just stand up and watch them.

E: Perhaps it is the fear of not being liked or that people will say “this is boring” or whatever.

T: Yes, but every time they danced, people just sat there.

E: Do you think it gives them a bit of pride in their own cultural background?

T: Oh yeah. I tried to get other cultures into it, like Fiji and Vanuatu dances.

E: So you teach them their steps?

T: Yes. They give me the song in their language, and I try to find out what it means, so I teach the kids to represent the song but they say to me, it doesn’t go with this dance, if you’re happy you just dance and I say “that it is not in my way, I want you to tell the people what you’re dancing about, I don’t want you to go out there and throw your hands about, and say I’m so happy” and I say “you are representing that country and what it means” If it says you are going fishing, represent that you are going fishing, and you caught something.

E: Do they accept that?

T: Oh yeah.

E: So a little bit of a change from what maybe they expect a dance is?
T: Sometimes I play an English song and I just let them loose and they jump around and they say “why can’t we do this?” and I say “what are you doing? Please explain!” and I say “you look like a kangaroo, does that represent the song?” “No, I’m just jumping around”.

E: So the representation that you use in a dance something that you draw on from your own culture?

T: That’s how we’ve been taught.

E: So the actual moves are they things that have been taught to you or when you look at the song you think oh try this and…

T: That’s been, every time we danced that’s… even when our parents when we were little, there’s a move to go with what you say, so every song represents something.

E: So really it’s a vocabulary that you have and you think ‘that means thank you’ that means something else and then when you put a dance together based on the meaning of the song then you’re actually putting it together yourself.

T: Yes, so you have to listen to the song and you try and put whatever the song is saying you have to represent it. Even the kids, sometimes when they dance, I let them loose, and I say to them “show me when you say “hello” to another person, tell me how you represent that, how do you tell a person without using words. Tere demonstrates with hands and I say “no, your body language and they go Tere demonstrates and I say, “does that mean ‘hello’” and then they go “oh, ok” and demonstrates “that’s it, that’s how you say ‘hello’; and I say “how do you say ‘come here’? in a dance, they said ‘come here’ and I say ‘come here’ demonstrating with gesture; I teach them things like that, the rain, the sun, wind Tere gestures for each.

E: Do they come up with any dances themselves?

T: Yeah, they try.

E: So it’s a choreography they do?

T: Yeah and I say “right, we’ll find the song that represents whatever you’re trying to tell me” but they always catch up when I say something like “what am I saying?” gestures and they say “oh, you’re playing with the ball” and I say “hello”

T: They try to get smart sometimes.

E: So do you see this group as growing at all?

T: To me this is something for them to learn and something for me too.

E: To keep your culture alive in here?
T: Yeah.

E: Because you don’t have this like you used to at home with it happening all the time?

T: We grew up dancing, always joining a dancing group, every time the church got a function, we joined in that, there was always something you joined in. When you hear the drums, that’s the thing, when you hear the drum, you have to follow where the drum is.

E: Right, go dance and sing and it’s a party?

T: Yep. Usually school nights, they do the drums at 6 o’clock and you hear the drums at the end of the village and people just come to it.

E: And there is something going on?

T: Yeah, then they tell you there’s a function coming up and the church is fundraising, or the community is fundraising.

E: Do you miss it? You must obviously?

T: Yeah.

E: But you’re happy here?

T: Well, I’m quite happy here. I’ve got a very close family in New Zealand and in the Cook Islands, you can’t do anything wrong, so here I can do whatever I like. There’s nobody to put you in line.

E: Now, your son who is in your dance group. Now he also goes to music lessons. What’s he learning?

T: Tonight it is the recorder; he’s been doing it for 5 years now.

E: With the Music Auditorium which is part of the Conservatorium for primary school kids?

T: Yes.

E: Okay so he learns the recorder. What else does he do?

T: Piano which is private tutoring and he plays all sorts of music with the drums and he does drums at school, percussion.

E: So he loves it?
T: Yeah, I tried to get him into soccer or something sporty, not the rough one, (not happy with it) so I put him into music.

E: Music is quite important to you. So with this dancing group did that come out of the Friendship Group or was that something that was completely separate or is it because you got to know that Ruth is here?

T: With a function, I asked my son and my girlfriends if they wanted to dance, because there was only 3, my son and my girlfriend’s boy and girl, there was only 2 boys when we first started.

E: So you just thought I am going to do this?

T: Yeah, I asked them because I don’t mind doing it, I just asked them if they wanted to dance and they said “yeah, we’ll give it a try”.

T: The first time we did it, they didn’t want to do it, so we practiced and practiced and then when we had our first function, when they danced they were so scared and when they went out there, they said it was silent, it was so noisy when they came out, but when it started everybody was just silent, sitting and watching and they couldn’t believe it, that people were interested. Since then they got their confidence.

E: So how did it build from there? So you that the three and then other people saw…
T: Because people saw it was so nice and asked “can’t we join?” For me I just wanted the islanders, I didn’t want any Australian but then I thought “why?” because I used to teach Hula in New Zealand too, and I thought “I’m not going to go through that again” but when they said “can I, can I, please, please?” and I said “are you sure, don’t just come and go to the corner and say ‘I don’t want to do it. If you’re sure, then come”, so they keep coming.

E: Again, this is a voluntary thing. You don’t get paid or anything like that?

T: No.

E: You don’t have an issue with that, like it’s not as if you’re out of pocket.

T: No, I’ve got no issue with that. To me I love watching kids, that’s the thing, every time I go to a function, if there are kids dancing I sit there and watch, and have a good time watching them. I love watching the little kids, the way they move, the expression on their body (sic), I go “wow” it amazes me and in our culture we do love, we make our kids dance from babies.

E: So you went from teaching Hula in the Cook Islands as a teacher or something that again was really..?
T: Because my girlfriends’ kids wanted to dance but they’re too embarrassed to go in to the Cook Island performance things, so I just go to their house and teach them how to, and if the school wants them to dance and take them into the school.
E: So it’s all voluntary community?

T: Yes.

E: Did you actually have a profession or something like that in the Cook Islands?

T: In our culture we don’t pay to be a dancer. That’s one thing we don’t dare do. When they go and dance, they get paid, when people throw money on the floor to appreciate, that’s the only money they get paid.

E: Did you actually have a profession there?

T: Yep.

E: What were you doing?

T: Dancing.

E: So that was your profession?

T: Yeah. My brothers and sisters are all dancers.

E: So would you consider yourself a professional? Not in the Australian sense that you are up on stage and stuff but your job was to be a dancer in your culture. Was that how your role was?

T: In our culture everybody dances, we don’t single anybody out, we all are dancers. In our culture everybody is a dancer or singer, we don’t say that we’re professional dancers, everybody’s got it.

E: At school it would be a totally different way of being educated there than it would be here I would imagine?

T: No, we don’t get educated. In school we have a period of just singing and dancing, they give us half an hour.

E: So that is part of the school thing but then you go out…

T: Back in the villages, they beat the drum up and off you go and practice, so everybody gets up and do their bit. There’s always the one that gets up and dances, always the one that sits and play the drums, guitars and ukuleles, you know, there’s always somebody that brings the equipment.

E: So they don’t learn the instruments by a teacher like they do here. Is that right? They just pick it up.

T: We learn as we go along.
E: So like the guitars, ukuleles, drums… Did you play anything?

T: I learnt how to play the drums, I know how to play guitar. I had seven brothers and they all played the guitar. The girls did the ukulele and the boys do the guitar and I wish now that I had played the guitar.

E: But you can play the ukulele?

T: I can play ukulele.

E: Have you tried the guitar?

T: I have tried but it’s getting the fingers around it. In our home always the boys pick up the guitar and the girls pick up the ukulele and it’s always been like that. The boys can play the ukulele better than the girls though.

E: Why’s that? Do they spend more time on it whereas the girls go and…

T: The boys spend more time on the guitars and ukulele and the girls get up and do the dance.

E: But the boys dance too?

T: Yeah.

E: It’s very interesting. I didn’t know much about the Cook Islands until today.
T: You should go there.

E: How far away is it from New Zealand?

T: A 3 hour flight.

E: A 3 hour flight to the Cook Islands from New Zealand.

T: It’s the same from here. It’s quite expensive to fly there.

E: So do you go home a lot.

T: The last time we went was about 3 years ago.

E: And you think ‘oh, I’ve got to go home now?’

T: Yeah, than trying to save up for it.

E: And to get to New Zealand it’s the same?
T: A bit like flying straight from here to the Cook Islands.

E: But when you are on the Cook Islands how do you get to New Zealand?

T: Plane.

E: So it’s always by plane? It sounds like there is a bit of a relationship there?

T: Yeah, we are under New Zealand citizens, New Zealand is like the Big Brother to us.

E: But you don’t always go to New Zealand, it’s just that you belong to the same governing body. Alright. Is there anything else about the International Friendship Group that you think is worth talking about?

T: It’s a good group.

E: Do you see yourself being a long life-member.

T: Yes.

E: Because new people come in, they actually teach new songs and that’s what keeps the interest going?

T: Yep.

E: So it kind of doesn’t get boring or anything?

T: Sometimes we get there and have a chat, do a few songs and then go home.

E: It is the friendship side of it that you actually talk?

T: Yeah.

E: So before this group did you have much contact and stuff that was going on for you in the Community?

T: I usually go to Sydney because most of my family lives there and I get involved with the Cook Island culture there.

E: There, but here is sounds like you’re the person that starting things happening?

T: I have tried to find more Cook Island people in Bathurst but there’s none.

E: But with this group, the dance group that’s something like a little thing that you do. Do you see it as something that is new and maybe influencing?
T: Yeah. It gives the kids confidence to do something, especially my son, he’s very shy, but since he’s been doing this, he can get up there and do his thing.

E: So it is kind of… for your son but also…

T: Also for myself.

E: Because you love the kids getting up and…

T: Yeah. because I love to see the kids perform and watch them.

E: What I am trying to work out is that you’ve got your community in Sydney, there is a big Cook Island community there, so here in Bathurst would you say that there is a community here for you?

T: Yes, the International.

E: Before that, was it just a fairly disengaged; were you a part of what was going on here?

T: Not at first. When I first moved down here I was so alone and…

E: Isolated?

T: Yeah, because when I moved down here my son was only 2 years old. I looked at a map and picked Bathurst.

E: From?

T: From Sydney. I didn’t like Sydney because of the fast life. I said “I’d rather go and live in the country” so I looked at the map and thought “yeah, I’ll take that one” so we’ve been here and now I wouldn’t move anywhere else.

E: Was there a transition time when you first moved here that it was a bit lonely or something?

T: Yeah, because I didn’t know anybody down here, there was nobody, so I put my son into the day care up at Kelso, and I got to know some people up there, but there wasn’t any connection until I met the girl, my friend now with 3 kids, she married to a Vanuatu, she’s Australian but she married a Vanuatu and her son was going to the same kindy as my son and that’s how we got to know and started from there and I got to know people and she introduced me to other people and through the school.

T: I got to meet other people.

E: So what you’re saying is it’s up to yourself to get out there and make things happen?
T: Yeah, it’s strange moving from New Zealand to here.

E: Different culture altogether.

T: When I first moved to New Zealand the culture was different and I had to get used to that and then moving from New Zealand to here – Oh!

E: And Sydney is another world.

T: But when I moved to Bathurst people were more friendly than in Sydney, some people would say to you ‘hello’ and you would say ‘hello’ to them and they would say ‘hello’ back, in Sydney you say ‘hello’ and they walk across the road.

E: You seem pretty happy here.

T: Yeah, in Bathurst you say ‘hello’ to people, and they say ‘hello’ and I got attracted to that.

E: The friendliness of the country.

T: Every time I go to the shop I always so hello to somebody.

E: Do you see you will be doing anything else like what you are doing with this performing group with the kids and radio program. Anything else happening?

T: I don’t look ahead at what I’m going to do tomorrow; I just go with what I’m doing now, if something happens. I don’t say “next week, I’m going to do this & that because it gives me a head ache.

T: So I just go with whatever I’ve got now and just go with that and if direction changes, so be it. So I’m just quite content with whatever is going on.

E: Thank you very much for participating in the study and maybe one day I’ll come out with see the group.

T: They’re dancing on Saturday.

E: Does the kids group have a name?

T: I have tried to ask them because I want them to give me a name, but they still haven’t given me a name, so at the moment it’s just ‘a dancing group doing the Hula’ and that’s it.

E: Just Hula dancing group?

T: Dancing group.
E: Then maybe they will come up with something.

T: I said “I’m not going to name it. I’ll give it all to you. You’re the dancers, you tell me” they’ve come up with silly things.

E: Just to be silly?

T: Yeah and I said “no, we don’t want to be called that” so I just leave it to them and one day they may come up with a name, but at the moment it’s not a big deal.

E: You’re meeting tonight. It’s every Wednesday night?

T: Every Wednesday night, 6:30pm and try to finish at 8:30pm. I drop them off at home in my car, as long as we don’t get stopped by the cops (laughs), with so many kids in the car “the cops are coming “ they know because I said “if we’re caught, don’t say a word”.
IX. Margie Raw Transcript

Margie Breen, Theatre-maker/Community Performance Development
Interview recorded at Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre
18 September, 2006

E: I’m with Margie Breen at BMEC, which is the Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre, and Margie, what is your official position?

M: It’s a new position – its one month in – and it’s a mouthful. It’s the Performing Arts Producer/Animateur. Do you know what the word animateur means?

E: Well, I think it would be good for the audience to find out what this means.

M: OK. An animateur is someone who – I actually looked it up on the net to see if I could find the word – there’s a course in Victoria called the animateuring course and I think that the person who runs it has to explain to the students what an animateur is – it means to breathe life into something, to animate, to bring life into something. But I think in this context, it means that, rather than just producing, which is often about the monies, it’s about getting involved on a community level to encourage performing arts practice in Bathurst.

E: and so the next question was - how would you describe the role?

M: Well, I think I just did that

E: So we’ve actually just had a conversation before recording, so I’ve got a little bit of information about what you were saying, that there was this presumption that your role was about accessing funds for the different community groups and that you were seen to be a person who might be able to help with the funding of these projects, but really your position is more than that?

M: I think that it is, there are funds for the project, there are funds – I’ll tell you exactly, its $50,000 for the whole year, but that $50,000 is to bring in outside artists to run a community project or to run workshops or, you know, its funds for the community to encourage performing arts practice, not necessarily to fund different projects, although there are funds aside for that. The funds – I didn’t even think about the funds when I accepted the job – you know, I didn’t think that would be a major part of it. And I think it’s great that we do have a pool of funds, so that if there is a great project out there that we can support it financially, because it’s hard to make work without money.

E: Really the focus of what you see yourself as, which I suppose is the animateur part, is that you would probably birth things that you see are ideas that community people may have, but they might not have the skills, so it’s like a skills development?
M: And also supporting people – it might not even be me – it might be someone has a great idea, and I’ve got someone in my mind, because we’ve had expressions of interest – and they’ve got a great idea but it’s in seed form and they might need a director or a writer on the project and I might not necessarily have the skills but it would be good for people to think they could resource me if I did fit the brief they needed, so we might pay an outside writer or director to help that person see their project through. So that, you know, it’s us kind of accessing people

E: So you would really see yourself as getting to know that the people and the projects are at such a level that you could say “Well, maybe you haven’t thought about getting a screenwriter, or whoever”

M: Yes

E: And suggesting and perhaps hopefully they would see that would be something that could benefit the project.

M: Yes

E: So it is kind of mentoring, I suppose, to a point

M: Yes

E: OK. And how is your position funded?

M: OK. Long history, but the Australia Council for the Arts, Arts NSW and local Council but through Stephen Champion, got together and Bathurst was chosen as one of the centres – there’s $150,000 across NSW - and they looked at all the regional centres and went “Bathurst fits the criteria” because there’s a university, because there’s already a performing arts community here, and because Stephen and BMEC exist here.

E: And Steve’s position is?

M: He’s the Entertainment Centre Manager

E: And he’s funded solely by local council?

M: Yes. His position is a local council position

E: So he’s accountable to

M: Council. And so am I really, through Arts NSW gave the money to Council to administer. So, although its Arts NSW funded, Council, just for ease, administer my project.

E: Is that relationship with Council strong and present or they observe from a distance?
M: I think so and I think that Lesley Atkinson, the new cultural policy person is my boss. She has a broad vision and is very supportive of this project. It is very important, both Lesley and Stephen are really excited and supportive of the project I think.

E: Oh, OK. So it sounds like everybody is….

M: On the same page. I hope so.

E: What is your arts training background?

M: I actually went to Charles Sturt, here the local university and studied Theatre Media and I left that in 1993, I finished. So since then I’ve been sort of training in physical theatre and worked with different physical theatre companies in Australia, and just picked up training where I can, gone to as many dance and physical theatre classes as I can and I worked with a company that has a visual arts focus, so physical and visual, and worked visual artist, sculptors and puppet makers for 3 years, I was a core member of them. So I kind of got training on the job as well.

E: So you chose the areas that were interesting and you thought “I’d like to follow that”?

M: Yes. In a strange way too I fell into things and met people who asked me to come along and do this and as then as things like that happened, it just developed. I didn’t really chase it.

E: Are you happy to be where you are at now with this position?

M: I am. I’m finding this position, although I’ve worked with regional communities that would be considered the most challenging, I’ve worked with young people at risk, I’ve worked with homeless people, I’ve worked with traditional indigenous communities, I am finding one month in Bathurst more challenging than I’ve had. I think its probably because I grew up here as much as anything..

E: Most people probably think that was an advantage because at least you’ve got that home ground advantage,

M: Oh it’s great

E: but the draw backs are there too?

M: Yeah, it’s a small town.

E: So there is, just speaking to a number of different people in the regional arts development area, there does appear to be this divide between the regions and the cities and there are perceptions that artists in the cities are better resourced and they have more opportunities, whereas people who are aspiring or professional artists do it tough?
M: It’s funny. It’s really interesting, because I do come from here and I went to Sydney to get work, I guess, and went overseas to get work. People in the city look at regional centres and go “They are so much better resourced.” People in the city are doing it tough because they are living in the city and if you are an artist and you try to work in the city, you have higher rent and chasing… it’s a busier more chaotic thing, so I think that’s a very interesting perception actually. Having done both, I think it’s very interesting.

E: So do you think there are more opportunities because the population is more sparse and less than the concentration…?

M: Definitely that’s the key thing. There are more opportunities in the city and that’s the thing that you do tough and also finding like-minded people to create work with, that’s where you have a surplus of that in the city. So many people doing it because of the sheer population

E: Whereas here there would be certain people identified as the key people?

M: Yes, and I think this project is an interesting one because it will allow hopefully, us to unearth people who might actually have an interest or be musicians or visual artists who could actually really benefit from this project, or some funny guy who everyone has always thought has the potential to be a comedian. It’s an unearthing process as well, a development process I would hope. That’s what excites me about the project

E: And so far can you see that there is a vision that can be realized?

M: I think so. I think that it’s just thinking broadly and not being stopped by resistance within the community, just kind of working around it and trying to… I think the hardest thing is trying to please everyone and that won’t happen.

E: Yes, It’s good to be realistic about that. Regarding your arts background, do you identify as a professional arts practitioner.

M: Yes

E: You do see yourself as professional?

M: I have, yes, yes.

E: Is that because of where you’ve come from being involved in the different arts projects and having developed certain skill levels?

M: I don’t think that I’m better than someone who has - I mean necessarily as an artist I don’t feel an ego attachment to it. I feel like I’ve - since I left Uni, I have worked in bookstores and served people food while I’m doing it, but my primary focus since I left Uni has been to work in theatre, to work in the arts. And that’s been tough, and I’ve done it, yes.
E: There appears to be a divide between the aspiring artist who is the taxi driver but wants to develop the ability and the potential but doesn’t somehow get the opportunity to do it. Does it depend on how you see yourself?

M: Yeah, it’s funny though – I can’t even remember his name, but my Mum works at a school here and we gave the cleaner a lift home, and he’s an artist, and he identifies as an artist who cleans…

E: For a living?

M: …to support himself. To me, I think of him as an artist. He cleans, but he goes home. 1% of the artist population makes a living out of…you know the statistics…and I’ve been asked to fill out a survey because, you know, they go “well, you’ve been working as an artist” – whether that’s running a community project or whatever it is, as an artist. Not that many people get paid, and so you can’t say that you’re not an artist just because you clean a school. You’re still making art and that’s your life work. That’s your life’s work.

E: So how would you define art?

M: I think that really that’s it for me. I think if your life’s work is to make music, to make theatre, to paint, to create, then you’re an artist. Even if that means that whatever you have to do to make money, it’s still… The whole thing about professional is another thing. People say if you get paid for your art, then you’re professional.

E: Is that how you see it?

M: I think that when you look at work, and you can see sometimes people make work of a very high standard, and they’re not getting paid a scrap, so, no, I think sometimes it is the level you work towards. And then there are people who just get in and want to do it, and play an instrument with a group of people and have a good time, and then there are other people – like who do the local amateur thing, because it’s about the community and bonding and all those great things that other people who are professional get to experience. But sometimes, the most professional people are not in it for that at all. It’s an interesting thing I think.

E: Could it be a question of value, like the value that’s placed on it. One person might see that they’re not getting paid for it, therefore they’re not professional, whereas another person might look at the quality of the work and think “Well, I get it”, even though they’re not making money from it but it’s important. Is it the value that’s being put on it?

M: I just came from working in a theatre in Darlinghurst where all these independent companies, and a lot of them were NIDA trained or really highly trained, they put their own money in the project but they’d been working mostly primarily as actors, doing whatever, working as a collective, and sometimes the work was good, sometimes the work wasn’t good, but they were always striving for professionalism. And I think it is
about striving for the best piece of work you can make. There’s a place for community and then there’s a place… and both are good.

E: Equally valid in their own way?

M: In their own way, absolutely.

E: So maybe this thing about “what is an artist?” is like “what is creativity?” I mean, who gets to activate that in themselves, or do they see that as an important life force or something?

M: Yes. I’m idealistic but I have worked on a lot of projects, like the ones with young people at risk and with indigenous people and I believe that everyone is inherently creative – I mean, whether we follow it and some people say “I don’t have a creative bone in my body.” I just don’t know if I believe. It’s just whether you choose or, I mean not everyone wants to, but I think everyone has their talents.

E: Perhaps we don’t understand the processes of creativity properly. Maybe that’s the question that’s baffling people. I know there is a big push for creative industries, where there is an economic impact on the work that you’re actually do and you produce and you can show by the number of audience that you can pull into what you do. So there’s that economic side of it?

M: Oh, it’s funny now. Big corporations are now paying creatives and actors to come and get their corporate team creative, and I just think that that’s great – pay actors to get them to work. To get the corporates to run around the table…

E: So maybe they’re trying to tap into this energy, what you’re saying is,

M: loosen up

E: everybody can be creative

M: Yes

E: but maybe some need to be guided into showing them how?

M: Yes

E: With this question about your role in terms of community arts practice, I think you’ve covered that with the groups you’ve worked with

M: Yes

E: Do you see yourself as a leader? In your position, do you see yourself as a leader?
M: It’s interesting, this position. Because I have come from, just left directing and facilitating and teaching and running workshops, I’ve come from positions of leadership. And this position feels less. I feel like this is an adjustment, but this position feels more like a seed planter.

E: That’s very artistic.

M: I’m trying to think about it in a positive way.

E: You know how you feel about what you…

M: When I applied for the job, I thought it was a very self - I’d be managing my own, shaping of things and it would be a creative position. And it can be, but at this point I think it’s just a…

E: Feeling your way?

M: Yes, and planting a few seeds

E: And then hopefully seeing the fruits…?

M: Hopefully someone will water those seeds.

E: So, I think people in positions where they have got some power or authority that gives them the ability to realize projects… I think in respect to community, do you look for guidance and leadership? I’m just trying to work out how to balance how people look for guidance as opposed to being nurtured and encouraged, but maybe in a different way. I suppose I’m looking at where people may say “I don’t know very much, but this person does. So they’re going to show me what I need to do.”

M: Well, OK, I’m thinking about your question. But I’m going to answer with an example.

E: Please, yes

M: For this project, I think one of the first steps is about skill sharing and asking people within the community to bring skills to a round table of workshops and finding peoples’ strengths, and trying to shape community collaboration through finding peoples’ strengths. Does that answer your question – kind of left of field?

E: Yes, I think it does because what you’re saying is that it’s a shared directive that comes from people working on the issues themselves rather than someone coming in with an agenda saying “Well I’m here to lead and guide”. It’s like “I don’t really know”

M: Yes, and also “I don’t know you, who are you”. I think that’s a big thing as well. Like, going into Tennant Creek, which is this community that we went to, we weren’t invited but there were still “Who are you. What do you know” from the east coast,
which is another country when you’re in the desert, but they still – you know it’s different, because there was an invitation. I think when a community doesn’t feel like they’ve invited someone, then you’ll get resistance.

E: Is that what happened at Tennant Creek?

M: No, they invited me.

E: They invited?

M: Yes, there was a bit of that though “What do you know?” and “Don’t tell us how to do things in this town.” I think there’s always… but we were working with the young people, and when you work with the young people, especially when you’ve got a really good heart in it, people will accept that.

E: And they will gauge your intention by how you operate?

M: deal with the young people, and how the young people deal with you.

E: So it sounds like it was successful?

M: Oh yes. Loved it. Life changing.

E: Good for you, or…?

M: Probably I think I learned more than they did, but I think the performance – yes, life changing for the young people as well, but there was a performance - they had regular performances and that was something that was initiated within the community, so I was just one of the invited guests. At the initial stages, I was one of the first artists, but they have developed and the young people are thriving with it. It’s really a successful project.

E: Was there a structure left in place to continue…?

M: Yes. A local guy set it up. The local aboriginal council asked for it to happen, so the elders asked for it to happen, re-engaging the young people through arts. They hired a non-indigenous guy who had an amazing passion for it, and they secured funding through the Department of Education and Training to do it.

E: So its continued on because..?

M: Continued on because it was successful and because he could….he was a Sydney guy who had contacts and just brought in artists and made it happen, and now he’s left and kept it going.

E: With him leaving, the skills development has…?
M: It’s lifted. I mean I think that the most positive outcome – I was sent the second time to mentor a local artist, who is the woman I was telling you about who I would like to keep working with, talking about making a show.

E: She’s an indigenous person?

M: She’s an indigenous person. She went to NIDA which is very interesting. NIDA? Do you know what NIDA is? National Institute of Dramatic Arts. It’s like The acting school in some people’s minds. But she went there and she’s an aboriginal woman who is a local woman. The best outcome would have been for her end up running that project. But for whatever reason, she did not and now there’s a non-indigenous person in that role, but at least it’s still happening and the indigenous people are getting….

E: Accepting the whole structure?

M: Yes

E: Do you think there is a link between community arts practice and enabling individual collective capacity? I think we’ve talked around that.

M: I definitely feel like there is. I feel like I’ve seen it because of that work I did in Tennant Creek actually. I taught drama at Juvenile Justice (Yasmar) and then we did a project in Cobham and I’ve seen people that the community don’t see as having worth, really blossom through the arts. So that’s a perfect example of saying, yes it can give people…

E: Skills?

M: Yes, community arts practice can definitely develop individuals and communities. I believe so, or I wouldn’t be doing my work.

E: What was that example? Where was that?

M: Cobham, which is a boy’s detention centre. We did a show. We spent about 6 months collaborating with them, 3 months of intensive rehearsal, and made a show for the public with young boys in custody. And they were tough, I’ll tell you what. But they really came up and they rose to the challenge and developed as young men, and it was all about their development, because they were young men, so we focused on that, about their self esteem and their sense of self. We taught physical theatre, we did puppetry. They got to write scenes, we performed it for the community and they wrote songs, we worked with a musician. They did hip hop, and R&B and sang songs to their mothers. It was all very powerful. Yes, it was

E: And when that project terminated, do you know what the ramifications were?

M: That was something that I felt really strange about, because of the whole concept of sustainability – if you come into a community and you just do something great and they
all love it and they are all happy and then you leave a massive hole. The group of young men that we worked with, there were a lot of islander boys, they focused on their music – it was an interesting culturally - they divided in their interest. Lebanese boys that we worked with were physical theatre focused and I taught the physical theatre side of it. So I was teaching them stilts. And a couple of guys taught them aerials as well, and I worked with these boys that I found – like I developed relationship and their faces were splashed all over the papers because they were gang rapists quite soon after and I think they had a really hard time, of course, and it’s a bit shocking to see that’s….. We knew that there were sex offenders on the project but we didn’t know what they’d done or who. But the hole that was left, in some ways that was a social therapy, but we left and then we went overseas on tour, and it was a bit like “What happens to these kids after we leave?” But at least they had a great experience, you know.

E: I suppose what you’re saying is possibly is if there is a sustainability charter before or during intervention, then that possibly could be a way to go in terms of art?

M: Yes. I think that is actually with community cultural development. Having just got a grant from the Australia Council for a project that I was working on before, I learned their charter and it is about sustainability. And actually Cobham, after we left and we went overseas, the musician who had worked with us got funding to go back in. I think it’s because he personally said “what’s going to happen to these kids after we leave.” Because he developed strong relationships with all the kids that did the music

E: He felt personally responsible and he so he went back?

M: Yes. And I think he was supported by everyone in the juvenile justice system and the artists that had worked. We all went “Yeah that’s great” and he continued a set of workshops.

E: Regarding CCD, there seems to be quite a shifting ground happening there, in that people are recognizing that community cultural development is an area where social change can happen, but there’s been a major review of that whole sector?

M: It’s confusing. I did the scoping study that Elizabeth Tupper ran. I haven’t read the results - but I answered the questions. Because I was running the CCD project and had applied for funding, and all their clients they asked…

E: Having that background, do you see that there’s been a shift away from community cultural development to something else?

M: When I was getting advice from the Australia Council about how to apply for a grant, they said they didn’t understand what was going on themselves It’s changing and it’s coming from the top and who knows where its going to end

E: Having read all these reports and trying to sift through them, it appears to me that there is some kind of a divide between the arts workers who are mainly politically driven because they see that there are the marginalized and people on the fringes, the homeless
and what have you and that things can happen for them if they participate in these CCD projects. But then there’s another perception that arts workers really are producing works of art that are to be consumed.

M: It’s interesting. This project that I was running at Darlinghurst theatre, I applied three times for funding.

E: Through CCD?

M: Through CCD Australia Council, just the Australia Council. I targeted them because I wanted a certain amount of money and I know what they would give and it wasn’t just for the sustainability of the project – it’s a 6 year old project – I worked on it for 2 years. I applied for 4 – there’s a round in now. I find out in November. Just a month ago we got advice that we were successful and they came and saw it and the work is not about the art - I mean it is, its interesting, because to engage anyone, we employed professional actors and made it the best piece of theatre we could. Professional actors acting out the stories. I can give you information.

E: that would be wonderful

M: Yes, I’ve got a DVD in my car. But when I talked to the CCD - she said “We understand. It’s not about the art being the best piece of art. It’s about the community and how they engage in it. And it is arts practice, because you’ve got actors, and I wouldn’t use untrained actors; I use very good actors, because, in one, it makes the story more real. It’s not bad theatre, you make as good as possible theatre, but it’s to engage the community. So I don’t know about - In terms of making good work with the community, of course you strive towards that, but its about the process. That’s a really interesting conversation. I’m not sure what…

E: Where it’s relevant with you is because you’ve just come from that., and you possibly are partly funded through the Australia Council, is it through Community Partnerships and Audience Development?

M: Well CCD. What, this budget?

E: Yes.

M: No. This is Theatre Board.

E: Oh, Theatre Board. So having come from where CCD has changed to Community Partnerships and Audience Development, have they changed their focus from CCD by changing their name and the focus to audience market development?

M: See, I’m not sure about that. I think that when I asked who they would apply for, they said community partnerships, not audience market development.
E: So community partnerships meaning that they would go try and broker collaboration and work with non-traditional, non-arts groups like health groups, so that’s what community partnerships means, that you try to join in with someone else’s bucket of money. I mean, that’s my understanding of community partnerships?

M: I don’t think you should ask me for answers because I don’t understand what’s happened with the Australia Council

E: It’s still changing.

M: It’s so still changing and I don’t know…..

E: But with you, because you’re under the Theatre And Dance Board, it’s fairly cut and dry.

M: Yes

E: So there is no….

M: No, in terms of the…

E: …question of about what their focus is…..

M: It’s interesting. I’m curious about why they hired me. It’s been my question ever since I got the job. Because I do have a CCD background. Because I do have a theatre background, but with a community focus

E: But the community for this position is paramount.

M: It is, it is

E: Getting the community to engage with BMEC?

M: That’s it. This is where the resources are. We’ve got this big theatre, we’ve got this-and like you said “is it mostly outside companies coming in?” We’ve got this amazing resource for this community and it’s like, lets liven it up, let’s make it happen

E: Do you think – this sounds a bit cynical – but do you think it is about building audience by getting a community engaged and so therefore they would be more likely to fill up the seats?

M: Yes. But there’s nothing wrong with audience development, to me. For me, I believe in theatre as an amazing thing, and whether that’s cynical or not. Sure that might be, but I don’t think that’s at all what it’s about. I think that that’s not all that it’s about – it’s about creating arts practice, and part of being an artist, I personally think and not
everyone thinks this, but you have to see other art. I mean, it’s part of the education. So the people who say “We’re making the best theatre in Australia but we haven’t seen anybody else’s work” [Blah] Yeah.

E: The other area that I’m really interested in is the link between art and education. Not education in the strict sense of…

M: But learning

E: Yes, that actually propels growth of some kind. So what you’re saying is if you’re exposed to other forms of art, then you are going to learn and grow in your own art. But is there any other way that you grow, apart from maybe your own artistic practice, is there any other area of growth?

M: What do you mean?

E: I suppose what I mean is about civic society and how people behave towards one another. Which is probably a bit idealistic, but….

M: OK. I think, absolutely. I mean… It’s a hard question. Of course it is …I’m not sure if I really understand the question. I guess if you’re saying, outside your art, how you deal with people in the community, was that what you were asking?

E: Well, I think we say education, we think school, university whatever the hierarchical structures

M: Institutions?

E: Yes, institutions, that’s right. But I’m looking at education as broader than that. That everything that you are exposed to is an opportunity

M: to learn, oh yes.

E: So the question about what art or creativity is and how that actually promotes growth of some kind, which is education, where people are developing and growing as a result of what they engage in artistically and creatively?

M: Absolutely, in my experience I absolutely think that you grow when you express yourself. If you stand on stage and are brave enough to perform, or if you dance, or if you paint a picture and share it with people, of course you grow. It’s brave, it’s brave, it’s a sharing, creative act. And in my experience working with kids at risk and working with Indigenous communities and working with homeless people is that people do grow, you watch it happen. That’s part of what I love about working with people to make theatre, because you do see that development. So, yeah, I would say, absolutely. It is idealistic but I don’t care. You need idealists, because this is a very cynical corporate time in history.
E: It’s very dry and almost feels stagnant.

M: Yes, we need

E: vision and color

M: Absolutely. And I don’t think that any project that is funded by an arts council has anything else at its core than to improve the arts. So even though, like this project is funded by Arts NSW and the Australia Council, I think that their idea is to enliven, it’s arts focussed. There are not bad organisations, they’re arts driven organisations, in my experience. I’m not there’s a corporatisation of those funding bodies on some level, but I know the people that are in this during this project, have a good arts focus.

E: Just on the professionalism question, people who work in the arts as professional arts workers, professional arts practitioners, when they need to actually make that leap, I suppose, and engage with community, do you see that as an issue? Is it difficult for them if they have worked on professional productions at a really high standard, to suddenly be confronted with something that is community and grassroots?

M: I think that the dissemination of knowledge and speaking in the same language is the biggest issue there. So, to use an example, people want to put on a show, and they might have incredibly charismatic talented people to perform it. They might have somebody who’s directed and has great interpersonal skills and can direct, but they might not be able to give a brief to the technicians so that the technicians can read it. It’s all about language, I think. So it’s like empowering people through common language.

E: Right, right. OK

M: I sound like I know what I’m talking about. But do you know what I mean? So I’m just actually thinking, when you say is it difficult for professional arts practitioners, so I guess it’s what you are used to, and that there is a language in the theatre in particular, and its all about prompt opposite prompt, lighting…when you work in an industry, you learn the language and so you can be efficient. So then, if you have a community project and people who have great ideas but they don’t have the language - so it’s just about getting on with the language that you can all speak, I think.

E: Do you think that it is difficult to make that transition from where you have been operating at a professional level?

M: Sometimes. I was just talking earlier of an example of a project that I worked on with youth for the Perth festival. It was going out to communities and directing a show in 24 hours, with the community. It was great, it was challenging, but it was great, and part of that is, I guess, when you go into, and this was in remote, this was in Karratha, Newman and Port Headland, and they were fantastic, really. The community was great but I think it is a skill as an artist to go into a community and not speak a language that they aren’t going to understand. So it’s learning local language and its about that shared language, I think.
E: So you have to be prepared to do a lot of learning?

M: And that’s the best, and that’s the thing when you were asking about development, as an artist to go into a community, you learn so much. It’s so enriching for the artist. Hopefully the community gets something out of it as well, but in my experience, I’ve just learned my learning curve has been huge going into communities.

E: Yes, because it is interesting to see that definition of the arts worker that is working at that level where they’re the ones that are open to what’s happening around them, as opposed to the artist that sees themselves as being the one that’s skilled. And without any value judgment, they really do have those skills, so they are operating at a totally different level. There does seem to be that difference in how artists perceive themselves possibly; their identity in terms of who are the people that they are working with, who are their audience, are they collaborating, are they performing?

M: Yes. I just went and saw a performance in Broome that was actually funded by the CCD board and it was a 4 year project I think and it was a local artist working with a Sydney company and it was all these sorts of questions and watching it and thinking about “blah, blah, blah”, don’t ask me to talk, don’t get me started.

E: Thank you Margie

Tape Ends
E: I’m with Vandana Ram and Magamase Ntlabati (Community Cultural Development NSW project worker from South Africa). Vandana, what is the title of your position?

V: At the moment I’m just a Project Manager at CCD NSW, but up until last year I was the Cultural Diversity Program Manager. So for 3 years I was the Cultural Diversity Program Manager.

E: What’s the difference between the two?

V: Because I’m kind of basically, working more as an Artist in Residence at the Blacktown Art Centre and I wanted to finish off a couple of projects that I had started, so I’ve just kept that on (CCDNSW) as a one day a week and just doing Project Management. So that’s where I’m at.

E: So what were you doing before…?

V: I was a Program Manager for the Cultural Diversity Program and that meant a whole lot of responsibility, like looking at establishing a Program because there wasn’t one before. So essentially once this organization CCDNSW got set up they decided that they would actually have sectoral based Program Managers. So they had me, and they had an Indigenous Program Manager, and as of last year they started a Youth Program as well. So there was these 3 sectors which was meant to be Cultural Diversity, Indigenous and Youth. And I started pretty much within a year of the organization being set up and it had a focus to be in Western Sydney. I think I was telling you on the phone that it also has this other responsibility for Central Coast and a little bit of the Illawarra. We are NSW wide but we focus on those areas as a priority. And particularly in Western Sydney, the energy has been for Western Sydney.

E: So when you say the Program started, how long ago was that?

V: This is my 4th year in the organization. I think it was in 2002 that the Cultural Diversity Program go set up.

E: I’m trying to make the sequence between CCD that evolved from Community Arts in 1987 and so it then evolved into Community Cultural Development and then this Program that you’re talking about…
V: It’s just one within CCDNSW. It’s just kind of giving focus to particular sectors to communities, so that you target your training or your research development to those communities.

E: So the cultural diversity angle was always there with CCDNSW?

V: I don’t think it was always there, not in such an emphatic way I suppose. Maybe it was implied. I can’t speak about what was there before me really, but there’s definitely no documentation. Um, sorry what I should say is, a number of things have happened in the last, well the history of community arts I suppose. There were some organizations; there was one called Multicultural Arts NSW I think, or Multicultural Arts Association – that got disbanded. Carnivale gets completely chopped back. So a lot of things were shrinking, and I guess part of what we did was try and fill in the gaps. So perhaps when Multicultural Arts alliance closed up, some of those programs and ideas in terms of working in response to issues of cultural diversity, nobody was taking that on, so we picked up on that.

E: When you say we, were you part of it?

V: Oh no, I wasn’t part of it in that direct way.

E: So CCD saw it as a focus, so developed funding for the position, and then you came in to pick up that cultural diversity bag?

V: Yes. Depending on who you speak to, I think there are politics about all these things. There’s sort of an implication that the funding bodies when they started cutting back just said ‘well there’s no longer this organization, now you guys do this stuff.’ So it evolved in that way to some extent.

E: So it was more about picking up pieces rather than following on from a sequence of programs that were comprehensive and were actually delivering a service, it sounds like. It was more ‘well the funding’s been cut back, so these are the things…?’

V: I mean I don’t know. Multicultural Arts Alliance from what I’ve seen, it was like…other things have popped up now. So it’s always a shifting pattern I suppose. It seemed to be like an Artists Network or with practitioners coming together. Maybe it wasn’t as proactive. It did some things. Some things it did really well. I mean again, you need to speak to people that were directly involved. I wasn’t. One of the people you might want to speak to is Cinzia Guaraldi – she’s currently working 2 days a week at Liverpool City Council. She’s a Cultural Worker, but she’s got a bit of the history as well, you might get from her about Multicultural Arts Alliance.

E: OK but with you specifically, I understand that you actually do come from a background where you are heavily involved in different types of programs, not necessarily CCD. So what’s your background?
V: My background is old (laughs). Well I was on the Community Arts Board when I was at the Australia Council when it was still called that. So through the early ‘80’s to 1991 I was there. So I was there for 8 years basically. And I was there at the time that it changed titles to become Community Arts to Community Cultural Development. And so it was an interesting moment where again part of it is sort of, people keep shifting labels or titles partly just to survive and partly to go with new emphasis and I think what was happening then was sort of Keating’s vision for…you know a lot of creative communities sort of stuff but also the economic rationalist thing coming in. So a lot of the arguments that were coming in were about economic strategies and working in terms of the economy. So how arts and culture work in terms of economic development. And so a little bit of that push waiting to… stuff like Cultural Planning working with (interruption)

E: So, cultural planning through the Keating years, so that would have been Creative Nation which was around 1994, so that was before the change of Government. So the landscape changed with the new incumbent government…

V: And then I have a bit of a gap in terms of my own personal practice because I was at home having children. So there’s sort of, I’m not sure what happened a little bit through ‘90’s to about 2000 almost. ‘Cause I wasn’t as directly involved. But I was also dabbling more in projects, dabbling more in Project Management. So I worked on a number of things, always in Western Sydney. When I was at the Australia Council it was just an interesting time because I think there was a capacity to be a bit more open and flexible, and it really set some process in terms of, I think it was a little bit more cutting edge. It was more radical then and it allowed some structures to develop in the community. You know there was a lot of support, a lot of responsiveness. And so a lot of things happened for Australia that were really significant. We’ve had things like these network organizations and every state…there was a lot of action around, particularly like cultural action would have been a way of working, there was popular theatre – lots of interesting things were happening at that time. And then I feel it went into a bit more of a professional model. Equally at that time there was also money put into training, what was seen as training of the sector; so there would be traineeships, mentorships people would actually be supporting younger people coming through, people coming through.

E: You mean the staff, or is this in community…

V: There would have been a training person within the Community Arts Board who would support training programs out in the community. So some of these like the Community Arts Association, would have had a Training Program Manager called a Training person. Now we’re almost coming back to that again, it’s sort of interesting. So there’s all these cycles all the time. So what I felt was I guess, things were possible in terms of actually building up a network, building up people, building up structures. And then when I came back into the field again, it felt it had become more Professionalised. You had to have a certificate to say you were a CCD worker, whereas I think people were just developing the practice. So it was sort of like you know there were different models of practice in some ways. Now it feels more prescriptive to some extent.
E: So has it got from radical to conservative do you think? Is that one of the changes?

V: Maybe it reflects a bit of society as well. I’m not sure but I feel that. I feel like even what we offer in Community CCDNSW (interruption) we run Online Training and it costs I think $2000 or something like that, to do accredited Training. And that’s great. But it’s all on-line based. Number 1, how many people can afford to do something like, like who are we targeting and who are we actually nurturing practitioners. So there’s a sort of a question mark I have about some of things, about other ways we can actually build up the sector as well.

E: So it is about people who can actually afford the Training Program to pay for On Line Training. So there would be other people not necessarily able to afford it and they’re the one’s who are going to be missing out?

V: And that’s part of what I’ve been looking at other ways in which to develop more, just different types of training I guess as well.

E: So when you say that you were pretty much program based in how you worked with the Australia Council and now with this, so what kind of Projects were you working on with the Community Arts Board ?

V: At the Australia Council I think it had a…I mean maybe it was just a group of people at the time that worked in a particular way. And I don’t know, I think everybody has a different philosophy. It feels like it’s become more bureaucratic to some extent. There was just a kind of…but I think that once you’re a funding body, you’re always a funding body. Maybe we pretended we were a bit more open to things. I mean at the end of the day, you control the purses. But I think we were just still…you could actually look at what the gaps were. So I would be going ‘OK there’s nothing happening in terms of say Information & Advocacy work, let’s actually look at developing resources around that; so you could actually initiate things from there as much as…

E: Always looking at the community and addressing those things that you saw coming out of the particular area that you were involved in. But, and that was Cultural Diversity at the time?

V: I wasn’t doing particularly anything much to do with …it’s the first time…yeah it was across the board and yeah there’s a lot of issues…it’s actually probably a bigger story than we’ve got time to do, so

E: I might follow it up depending on what comes up and I’ll go over the transcript so…

V: I mean it’s like in a way ‘where is multiculturalism within there now?’ Like even within there they’ve tried to have Emerging Communities program which go up and down, which those things sort of…I’ve heard things like ‘Oh we’ll have an Emerging Communities Program for 3 years and once that’s over, that’s it, because those communities have finished emerging (laughs). Well it doesn’t work that way.
E: Well what’s an example of an Emerging Community?

V: Ah, well any of the things that we’re all doing where we’re working with refugee communities, and those refugee communities are coming here all the time. People are coming even now as refugees and the communities are changing depending on where the wars are and the refugees are coming from. So you can’t kind of say… so any of those would be…they’re the emerging communities. They’ve been here (?) 3 years or something like that and they’ve come from all kinds of war-torn situations and...

E: And that brings us to what you are doing now which is working with the African women’s group?

V: Well, actually no it’s a bit broader than that. Pretty much what…maybe what I’ll do is just describe what I’ve done through my program. When I first started I guess there was a blank slate, there was nothing, there was no precedent in terms of any work. So one of the first things I did was actually kind of go through a process of talking with everybody out in the field. So I spent nearly 6 months just really sort of looking at what the gaps were, what the practitioners were saying, and Western Sydney is really vibrant. You know it’s got really huge, it hugely cultural diverse. There’s a lot of people out there who are working on CCD stuff but um…and depending on who you speak to again, it’s like some people say ‘we just want to come together and meet more regularly or something.’ So there’s sort of a networking need. Other people just may need good documentation of projects that have happened out there. Other people might say ‘we need to be supported within our organization and you know.’ It’s sort of a bit of open field in the sense that different people are working…some are working with their Local Government and some people are working in non-arts organizations like in a community agency. But there are significant cultural workers. So it’s an interesting place where there’s a lot happening. It’s about the kind of environment. But having said that it’s also about how the people who are not working with the Arts understand and support these things. So some of the work that I was interested to do was to actually broaden that support and understanding. So I basically started a few different initiatives, and one was running a series of, I suppose they were like consultations in some ways but equally responsive to that developing side that would respond to it; so it might be ‘ok we’re going to stay with Blacktown, or we’re going to go with Parramatta, or we’re going to go with Liverpool. And actually try and set up a 2 day session where you look at Culture Workers in that area, and also invite other people from other sectors who work with women’s organizations so youth or disability. And to actually do a bit of mapping of what’s happening in the area, who knows about it, how do we actually make connections between these different sectors, and look at an arts approach at some of the issues that have been identified and to develop quite concrete little project ideas as well. So that was something that had started happening as well. It might be even, there’s an organization for example called STARTS which is for Survivors of Trauma and Torture who are mainly refugee people, and they work very much with, I mean they’ve got a whole bank of communities out there, but they may be doing Casework type of stuff. So to do like 2 day training with those workers, to actually understand arts and culture. So it’s sort of I feel like sometimes we work in what we know, but sometimes it’s extending…
E: Beyond the traditional art programs, is that what you mean? Like health and other types of community organizations.

V: Yeah. And some people are doing it. So yeah, it’s also to showcase some of the things that make it more broadly understood. So that was one thing. The other was to actually, when people say ‘we wanted to meet and come together more regularly,’ to actually have more issue based discussions. So rather than ‘let’s have another meeting,’ it would be around say a series of forums around sustainability, what are issues for sustainability. So you might have something on funding and professional development opportunities like more often than not a lot of cultural workers have been hanging in there, you know 15 years of work and where do they go next and there’s not a lot of flow in terms of opportunities that are available. But there are…so it’s partly to find out what is there and telling people about those things. Or it might be one…really interesting one we had was about, the word Leadership keeps getting popped up now; it’s like what do we mean by that? Are we leaders or are we facilitators? Like people were wanting to debate that idea you know, are we activists or are we leaders?

E: This is within the actual organization CCD?

V: Yeah

E: So what came out of that? Did you actually define what your…?

V: I think mainly people very clearly were wanting to be Activists than Leaders (laughs). But interestingly there are leaders that were sort of like ‘how do we define that?’ and you know it’s ok sometimes to say you are a leader, but you know you’re kind of… we redefine that word to some extent as well.

E: Was that documented that process?

V: Yeah it has been. It should come up on our website. I’m not sure where it’s up to but ah it was documented.

E: O K so it was from about that time in 20?

V: No no, it was only last year that we did that one. So it was just over the last 3 years I’ve been running these sorts of forums and things as well. And the other thing that was a gap I suppose was just looking at projects that happen and actually understanding the processes behind them. And to document things we learn more critically. It’s about critical analysis as well. I think more often than not, people are sort of doing their project and you know ‘OK we’ve done that. We write up our report’ and it’s like ‘yes’ and the you go on to and the short term projects. And it’s like, ‘where do we go next? How do we build on these things?’ So to actually look at some Models of Practice, and again one of the things I developed then was a sort of 6 months training program called ‘Showcasing Diversity and I’ve learnt huge amounts from that as well because it was actually a Participatory Action Research Model, and so I put it out because again I was
sort of ‘oh I can develop a nice glossy little publication which just goes “Oh I think these are 6 very nice projects but who is that representing?” So rather than that I was wanting and I think again I’d like to continue this process, it was to put it out there and to sort of say ‘There might be a whole range of projects that are happening out there that I don’t know about so anybody interested in being part of this program, put your hand up.’ It was an expressions of interest thing and I was trying to identify and unearth things to some extent. And it did happen to some point again, but not maybe as broadly as I imagined. And I think again it’s just part of just keeping on keeping on with this stuff (laughs). But what we got out of it was initially 12 people coming from different organizations. It became a consolidated group of 8 but we went through a 6 month process of meeting once a month and actually looking at all aspects of…it ideally had a project that was actually happening that could work practically with this purpose as well. But pretty much it was not so much Best Practice, but what we call Good Practice. Because again Best Practice is a bit of a loaded thing. So we re-quantified it as Good Practice. So we’re just coming up with some ideas and principals of what we mean by those things. So really all of it was also constant mapping of ideas and processes.

E: But working in collaboration with the people who are already working in the field? So it sounds like you’re doing like a management type of role, but I understand that you are an artist and maybe I don’t know that you see that as a separate thing to…

V: Yeah it has to be.

E: So just to understand that perspective as an artist, you are an artist in residence?

V: But that’s just this year. So this year, I’ve had…Because I would have just resigned, I would have had to pack up this whole program. And I mean someone else could have done it. But because I had initiated these 2 things and I wanted to finish them. I basically said ‘I’m happy to stay on 1 day a week and just do these 2 things. But they could have employed someone to be the Manager, which hasn’t happened. So I’m just keeping my hand just to finish up those 2 things.

E: Are you moving towards just becoming

V: An Artist. I think possibly yeah, no but as an Artist in Community still.

E: Yeah because what I’m trying, what this study is about is trying to work out how does Art work in community but within a management framework as well. So there are people working in the Australia Council and there’s not a Cultural Policy, but there are policies that Local Government, State Government and Federal Government to a point have been working on, but where is the Art in management?

V: More often that not I find people are artists who are working as Managers because you can’t survive as an artist, I mean that’s sort of at the end of the day for me as well. I don’t think I could have worked as an artist. You could do projects constantly but there’s no guarantee or flow with the stuff. So it’s very hard to survive as a community based artist.
E: I suppose where I’m going with this is, how can you be creative in that type of a role. I mean if it is about encouraging creativity within communities as a Manager and a Coordinator and working in that role as a Facilitator where is the creativity that…

V: I think that some of the things I do I try and do that stuff, so it was about…In fact I found Showcasing Diversity really interesting because it allowed…I keep trying to pursue issues to do with Cultural Diversity and how best to engage people. So what happens if you don’t, if you’re not proficient in English or and you know…all that stuff that’s happening that’s English based or other ways in which we work in diversity. So with image making or using music like you said. So one of the projects…I’ll confuse you because I do step in 2 worlds all the time (laughs).

E: That’s ok you say what you want and then I’ll …

V: No no, in that I’m always, even with the CCDNSW job, I was 3 days a week doing Project Management, and I’ve always kept 2 hands, and another hand as being an Artist and I try and…I need both things I think. So I’ve run projects all the way through the last 10 years – 12 years I’ve run Projects as well as [being] an artist.

E: It sounds like that that’s a skills base that you need to actually make a living, so that’s a skills base. But because you can’t make a living as an artist, then it’s almost a necessity, it’s a survival thing being able to develop your own ability…

V: That too. But I think it’s also where interesting things happen too is I need to work directly with communities, with people. I think I’m not an office based person. I can’t sit there and just be doing emails all day long (laughs).

E: ok. So but being an artist it’s very important that you are embedded in a community so that whatever you do, the type of projects that you are working on now as an artist in residence, what does that actually entail?

V: Well this is actually again a slightly different…it’s the first time I’m being a bona fide Artist in Residence, whereas before I’ve been a sort of Arts facilitator. There’s a difference, in that I think, here they’ve given me more time to develop my own professional work, my own artistic work at Blacktown Art Centre. But in the past as an Artist Facilitator I would sort of…I guess always have a conceptual framework that was creative and artistic and that would encourage people’s art making, but not really having my own stuff so directly in it. I mean it’s there, but it’s not out there. So a project might be oh I don’t know, I mean… I often work with a little team of artists, with at least one other artist, so one project might be to work with a musician. And there was a project I did which was trying to get together women from sort of Asia Pacific and using the concept of the Monsoon to develop songs and a choir actually around that and collect the music and then actually to get them to come together to tell stories of the Monsoon and what it represented and what it means here. So I mean there’s always a kind of creative framework.
E: So it sounds like its scoping as well: You’re going into a community and you’re still trying to identify needs and say ‘well here’s something that I can actually work but in an artistic capacity because it is about image making, or music making or telling stories. Is it always about telling stories do you think?

V: I think it’s the sort of bottom line to me. Somewhere there’s a story

E: however you do it with a group, visual or music – it’s the skill. Do you draw on the skills of the people that you work with…

V: Absolutely.

E: …so it’s what they’re bringing to the project, and is it like an enabling, a putting together? It’s like you’re making something?

V: I think more often than not people… I mean it depends who we’re working with, but sometimes they’ll go ‘I’m really not artistic.’ But in fact everybody has got that capacity. So you sort of start with giving them something that’s a tangible and you kind of ease them into something else. So you know sort of saying ‘let’s think about songs about the Monsoon’ allowed some way of actually talking about migration as well. But I think yeah, you work with what people can feel confident or reasonably ok about. The one that I’ve been doing now is a bit of a funny balancing act where I’m called an Artist in Residence, but I also have worked with a community base. So it’s still collecting stuff and working with community, but I’ve also got a huge amount of time to do stuff for myself. And it has been confusing. It’s not an easy kind of thing to work through. I’ve had to think about, I don’t just want to exploit people, and also in this instance it’s also my community. So I’ve ended up…it’s South Asian women. So it’s women from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. And what I’m exploring actually is color, the significance of color. And color comes into all sorts of other things.

E: So from a South Asian frame, is that the point of reference that you’re…how does it fit within the Australian experience?

V: Yeah. This is women who are living in the Blacktown region.

E: So it is where you are, where there is drawing from a culture, but it’s saying something about identity you think?

V: Absolutely. So it’s about what those you know…if you sort of say again, we’re talking about color but you know, color becomes manifested through all sorts of things apart from clothing and food. And so ok we’re looking at the sense…Turmeric is really a significant color both in dying clothes, but also in food, but it’s also spiritual, it’s highly spiritual. So the stories come out about what they do with that turmeric here in Australia now. So it is about bringing it here, to lived experience here.
E: So do you think the works that you’re working on in this confusion between working as a Project Facilitator and you, as yourself – is it about Identity, is that part of it. Like are you an artist or are you a facilitator?

V: Yeah, it can be but you know there’s one level when (?) goes we’re all artists and everybody can express ourselves as artists, and in our communities people do stuff all the time that I would say are artistic and creative. So it’s maybe challenging that word as well.

E: What is an artist?

V: Mmm

E: So it doesn’t necessarily mean this special, extraordinary…

V: I mean you know like my sister she’s been singing since she was in Grade 4 in a choir. I think that’s really creative, you know it’s a powerful thing. It’s something where you’re expressing yourself through an artistic medium.

E: So where does it cross over to where you actually become an educator? Like you know, there are people that are artists and it’s about their exhibition and their…

V: I think where it crosses over is...the thing I’m challenging is that people are sitting a little bit...well number one they might be isolated so it’s actually about bringing people together and trying to sort of understand other people’s experience. I’m interested in the cross-cultural encounter and I think that’s not happening terribly much in Australia in a very meaningful way, that we say these things, but in fact where’s the reality of some of the stuff. So you know a lot of things are happening and specifically with my community and so on, and so it’s really been challenging just to get women to come out of that comfort zone to come and meet talk to another woman from another community and say ‘actually we got stuff in common.’ But there is a history and politics that separate lots of people from where they’ve come from and we’re here now. So, there’s an educational role in just building those connections and talking and relating.

E: So what you…I’m trying to put it so that I can understand - so you’re community building through the process which is a creative process, but there’s also from what I can understand, another level where Art actually does teach and maybe the wider community, but it’s a skills development. Something’s going on that’s actually moving people beyond something that was where they were to somewhere different?

V: Yeah, yeah. And lots of different levels. That might be one small 6 week workshop process. Then just to bring them to an Arts Centre or an Art Gallery, is a whole other level of education for both the Centre and the community. That neither has really met before. So how do community arts centres or galleries or spaces like that actually work with communities in a meaningful way?
E: Ok. Now I understand with the changes that are happening within this sector, it is about Creative Industries so somewhere what you’re describing is really an important function of Art in Community. But if there is no way of measuring that, and you can’t say ‘well this is the impact’ economically or audience development or whatever, then how do you justify…?

V: That was one of the things I was looking at through last year with this training program on you know Showcasing Diversity. Really looking at ‘how do we measure these things. How do we measure processes like when we use words like empowerment or social change’ and that we’re not working with statistics. Say if we have 10 women in a program is that enough to say anything? Is that meaningful when people are talking numbers all the time. And I think that powerful thing from our sector that we offer is maybe the small… but maybe it’s how we describe those things and we really have to be better at doing that, but it is about the story. So it’s about the narrative and I think all our projects have narratives and it’s about capturing those narratives. So document all the time, keep asking the questions that allow people to put their own expressions…when you going through any sort of project, I think constantly allow the participants to record their own response to something and also shape that process. But I think we… so you know, even in this program we’ve been doing recently you talk to people right at the beginning ‘what are you expectations?’ If you can try and actually write that down, or get them on video talking about this stuff, there are little quotations of all experiences that get described, that you might not get on a piece of paper that’s not a statistic and I think that’s what’s important. A change in the participant way they’ve not made eye contact at the beginning and then they’re standing up and making a speech at the end is something you can document. And I think we neglect some of these more emotional and different types of ways people react. So one of the main things…it’s called Most Significant Change Theory; there’s actually a theory the Most Significant Change, MSC, Most Significant Change Theory and I thought that was really interesting. So every… once a week or once a month you ask your participant like ‘what has been the most significant change for you in this period of time, and how has this arts project been part of that?’ You know try and sort of tease it out. And keep capturing it. And whenever you put something out there, use those quotes because I think you get these amazing statements coming out. I might just give a little example of something else; I evaluated a Project recently, and I’d been talking to some of these participants. And when I first went into one this guy just said…I mean you know, you get the people that say nice things that say ‘oh yeah I’ve made nice friends and now it’s all wonderful.’ And you go ‘oh yeah, so what’ (laughs). Well, we can get really cynical. No, no but you know there might be other statements that come out. Like one man actually said he was from Iran, and he said ‘The sun sets in a different place in my country.’ And even just to use that as a quote I think can be really powerful. Because it gives you a sense that person comes from somewhere else. And you don’t have to go ‘oh, we have a really culturally diverse group here.’ You can just pull out stuff like that. Do you know what I mean? I think…

E: I suppose where I’m going with this, is like at some point it is about documenting and that you are actually articulating the outcomes of a project so that you can almost, well you have to justify what you do and what you’re role, and what’s going on in this particular program. I suppose it is about funding at the end of the day, because without
the funding you can’t actually go into these communities and develop these initiatives. So…

V: And so right now, I’m just going to the printers, is pulling that together. So it’s called ‘Documenting and Evaluating CCD’ and it’s a resource kit. And it’s still going to be an easy access sort of thing. So it’ll be 4 Fact Sheets and 4 of the Case Studies that came out of last year. Where people really tried to describe hopefully some of the mistakes and the sort of successes. And we’ll have it as an on-line resource which people can keep adding Case Studies to. So I’ve used Questions that get asked through the Community Builders website when you write a Case Study. It just takes you through a process of who’s in the group, and why did they join and dad a dad a. And you write it up. But it hopefully makes you tease out some of these things and describe, because a lot of the stuff we see is really glossy and doesn’t tell you anything.

E: But it’s almost like it’s a requirement of the work and the involvement in this group. You need to be coming out with these publications to say that what you’re doing is of value and…

V: Of our organization?

E: Yeah, I think…

V: Hopefully I’m doing something that’s a bit more than just developing something for the sake of it. Like I’m really wanting to make people critically analyse their work ‘cause I don’t think…

E: So that process actually allows for that analysis which you’re saying ‘it’s easy to get into a role and you’re a cultural development worker for 15 years but there is no strategic planning in it because you’re just surviving day to day, so there is a need to have that overview, maybe just take a back seat, but you need to have a facilitator someone like…

V: Yeah, yeah. I don’t think you do need somebody outside. I think what we need to do is build it into people’s thinking and also allow money to do that as well. So I think there’s…I’m not convinced about having an outside evaluator actually. I think it needs to happen as a group of people, who’s involved in that project. Because you are the best placed in some ways to sort of…but I think it’s about planning right from the beginning so you build in your documentation and your evaluation from the beginning. You don’t say ‘oh my God. I’ve got to write up my report now I’ve nearly finished the project.’

E: There’s a process?

V: Yeah, there’s a process.

E: So where do these guidelines come from? Is it something that’s part of the organization that there are guidelines what the process is?
V: That’s what I…that’s what this Resource Kit is.

E: It’s in development?

V: Yea, it’s going to print next week.

E: Oh ok and how accessible is that to community organizations?

V: Well that’s what I’m going to put on the website.

E: So it’s free access, it’s not as though it’s going to be paid?

V: No, no. I’m printing maybe about 1,000 maybe to give away, but then it’ll be on line as well.

E: Was that you’re initiative? You actually saw that as a need and you thought ‘I really need to do this?’

V: Yeah

E: Oh, ok. So I suppose that brings me to CCDNSW – do you think it’s in transition?

V: It’s in transition. I think you should probably come back by the end of the year and see where it’s up to.

E: Because no-one knows at the moment, is that…?

V: It went through quite a flat time, and I think it’s a bit hard to talk about it…

E: Like having spoken to other people working in this sector, it tends to be political and I mean I can only just say what I’ve heard, and there is tension between professionalism and people in the community. And I think there is this shifting ground from what I can understand, that there is funding made available to the more professional community organizations. And the people who are really just not skilled in that way, and probably just arts and crafts hobby type of community groups aren’t really get a look in. So I’m only looking at it from the Regional perspective and that’s what I’m kind of getting from it. But I don’t really know what’s happening in the Metropolitan areas.

V: Yeah, I tend to agree with that. I mean in terms… it’s sort of, it’s a bit hard because you sort of think ‘oh well on one level, yes we need the money.’ But what do people really want to do. Like how much are we sort of being pushed around by funding agencies.

E: That’s the question. I’ve actually asked that of other people, so they’ve got different ideas I suppose. But my analysis at the moment is that the funding is driving the initiatives. That’s what I’m seeing.
V: I think so too. I mean and you do need it...Like I went to India the year before last on an Asia Link Grant and I was there for 6 months and I was looking at comparative work. And thinking it would be really...like I want to learn what’s happening there, not just sort of be smug about what happened here. And what was really really strong is the place of the NGO’s. They’re really out there doing heaps of stuff, not in the same way that the work happens here. And what I was ending up was like me saying ‘Isn’t it amazing what we’ve got in Australia. We’ve got this really fantastically developed infrastructure.’ And then I come back to find that it’s all being chopped. It’s really kind of disappointing. But I think what I was seeing there was, is if you have to you just do it as well. Sometimes just the edge, having the political edge happens when people really want to have something to say, and they’ll make it happen. And I think you compromise sometimes here with guidelines. I mean you look at a lot of the funding that’s coming through especially things like the multicultural sector, it’s so controlling and that just don’t want you...like there’s even statements like ‘we won’t support anything that’s political’ and I find that amazing, that statement when you sort of say, ‘what is political?’ (Magamase laughs)

E: which is political in itself isn’t it?

V: And we just want to be living in harmony la la la. So how do we actually develop something that challenges... a project that happened recently was...one of the projects that we’ve documented is around Moslem women living in the Auburn area and they’re really talking about controlling their own image of who they are, they’re own representation and so on. And it is about yeah, how that gets seen at the end of the day. Some of these things still from the funding bodies will get the chop at the last minute when you know it’s seen as too political if somebody goes into a detention centre and asks questions, it’s seen as too political.

E: So I suppose it does bring me back to the question of ‘What is Art?’ I mean ...

V: I’m not sure, I think I talk about using I don’t know about art as such, but I’m looking at artistic and creative processes to create social change. I come from more that than just making art.

E: There’s a purpose, which is a higher...which is bigger than the self, and the individual?

V: Yeah

E: So with this experience in India you actually...so the NGO’s have a different way...?

V: Well a lot of them were doing interesting stuff, but it was still short term. It was still educational based. So it might be ‘ok we’ve got HIV issues, we’ll just use a theatre project to tell people about how to prevent themselves.’ It wouldn’t be really working with the community to develop their response to some issue.
E: Right, they come in with a direction or something and the community follows...

V: Yeah. They might use an artistic process but it was not that kind of engagement that I was, that we have here. So, they were really interested in what we, in what I was saying. And were really happy to take on...and in fact I ended up doing a little project there.

E: And what was that?

V: That was actually working with sort of the outskirts of Delhi. There was a really contemporary art space. I mean this is what was happening, like all these artists were taking up, making nice little studio spaces along this one spot where it would have been actually...well the real old community is about 500 years old, there’s still people living who are connected to that place. And that was really interesting. And then there’s sort of a street where all these art studios have popped up, including a contemporary art gallery. And they were really interested to engage with what was across from them which was essentially a slum, a tenement...it was like they were slum dwellers, itinerant workers and they were going ‘Oh look, there’s all these people there that we don’t have anything to do with them. We just buy our cups of tea from them. But we don’t know how to do anything.’ They often had artists come from overseas going ‘oh, who are these people and what...’ And maybe doing a project which responded to that community, but very much looking at it, rather than working with those people. So I did a very speedy 3 week, just a community consultation really kind of shows, which was really about story. It was like going into various one room shacks, and just asking whoever was there, ‘who’s your best friend here, and tell me why they’re your best friend?’ And we just got these 20 stories out of that. And why those friendship had happened and we had the exhibition of those stories in that gallery, and 80 people came in

E: Paintings was it?

V: No they were little printed images of...I took photographs of the 2 best friends. So it might be little kids, it might be 2 women. It was a whole range of people. And they’re stories and then we invited that community into that space and they all came.

E: Something they could relate to...

V: But you know, it was like opening the door and saying ‘you can come in.’

E: And how was that funded? Did you get funded?

V: That gallery supported that project and was happy to do that

E: So it wasn’t a labour of love. You actually got paid?

V: No, I didn’t get paid. I had gone on a Asia Link Grant. So I just did it.

E: So you already had funding to do it?
V: Yeah.

E: What I’m getting at is in these situations you don’t have that controlling thing that seems to be happening, where projects can evolve depending on what people feel that they want to do as Creative Community...

V: I mean I think you always probably need somebody to instigate and like some cases I think you get people who really want to do this stuff, but I think more often than not you need someone to show some pathway to the...

E: Right, that’s the role you were talking about ‘leader’ or ‘facilitator’...

V: Yeah.

E: ...middle ground that you’re doing

V: Yeah.

E: And here in Australia do you think that we can continue doing that kind of thing, or is it going to be harder and harder to go in and facilitate a program because you think ‘this is just dying to start here.’

V: I think it’s sort of interesting. I think it’s sort of...I’m picking up a few things. Like I think one of the main things we can offer through our work is a process of community consultation, I think we can do that really well. And we can demonstrate different ways of doing it that people haven’t quite worked out. And lots of agencies out there want to know about how to do it. And I think that’s something we can really push, to me that makes sense.

E: CCDNSW?

V: Our sector. I mean...

E: When you say our sector...I’ll get a definition here. So the sector is Community Development, or is it Arts/Community or Community Arts

V: Well community cultural development practitioners, that’s what I’m talking about.

E: ok so do you subscribe to this thing that it’s broader than community cultural development, like it’s not... I mean the terminology has restricted how it’s seen and it really should be seen more about creative communities or ...

V: I don’t understand the difference. I think it’s just really...

E: so it’s about terminology
V: Yeah

E: Mmm

V: I can’t see...I think what they’re trying to... I think it was a survival thing. I mean I can’t see...funding to continue...

E: For the sector?

V: Yeah

E: ok because the sector is shifting and changing but really no one knows where it’s going to go at the moment from what I understand?

V: Why is it shifting?

E: I don’t know...

V: I think it’s...I think the Australia Council didn’t want to look at it anymore, and...

E: can’t justify it as an economic interest? I know we’re going creative industries. I know that that’s a huge area that strategies are being developed on how to grow these creative industries because they are economically sustainable...

V: I don’t know what these things mean. I don’t know what creative industries mean (laughs with Magamase). You know I mean, yeah. I have to be convinced by some of these things. I think where I can see stuff is really connected with community working with a particular kind of issue working with empowering a particular community but when we sort of say Creative Industries, I think you know, I’ve had these pictures that...like a lot of the Councils are pushing. So you know a little...a street where there might be a whole bunch of artists who then...but then I think artists number 1 probably want to do their own thing. Maybe if they want to survive, you know I’ve heard people describe things like ‘oh well you can use their creative (?) to work with other you know...you know they can become graphic designers or work with businesses and offer creative ways of working...

E: Collaboration, partnerships

V: Yeah

E: But you can justify, or you can actually see the impacts, you can measure them I suppose, as opposed to community initiatives where...

V: How can you measure those? I’m not sure. How do you measure those?

E: Well in terms of audience and how many people attend, how much they’re selling and so there’s statistics that can be generated from that type of thing so...
V: I mean I’ve just got to be really cynical about this audience stuff. Because I think if you really connect with a group of people you’ll get that audience and that’s meaningful. Is it just about filling seats and theatre and I think that’s where people are getting pushed to do that. I was just really angry once when I heard somebody say ‘Oh the Opera wants to get the Chinese community.’ The Chinese community has got the most money. Ok so if you really want to get their money, what you should do is not the Peking Opera, because they’re not coming to see that. They want to see the Symphony and the Orchestra because they want their children to learn those instruments. Is that what we’re doing? Is that what this is about? I don’t know (laughs). I’m not interested in that.

E: But the development seems to be going that way. But it sounds from what you’re saying ...

V: Well I’m not going to be part of that.

E: But this publication you’re putting together is actually showing that there is an impact. It might not be growing an economy around those initiatives. But you can measure and so that’s really what you’ve done in putting this...

V: Yeah, and I think working say at Blacktown with that gallery, and actually trying to work on a long term process because nothing will happen... it happens very slowly. Really any of these projects, any cultural work, I think takes at least 10 years to really connect with the community and you need stability, you need people to stay there and work and build relationships. It’s all about relationship building.

E: Relationship building. And how is that valued and who values that? We keep talking about communities and somehow it’s being missed about what community actually means.

V: (laughs)

E: o.k I have covered all of these (pointing to my schedule of questions)

V: (laughing) You asked lots of questions. We should talk about (Magamase) very briefly. You want to describe what we’ve done?

E: Yes please

Magamase: Well what we’ve done is, we’ve worked with a group of 12-15 women from African communities; ladies from Sierra Leon, Sudan, Somali, Congo, Liberia and Zambia. So what we were looking at is training on CCD and community development. So it was sort of working with these ladies, and they were taught what is a community, and how is the community (?) in Australia. And then something like their communities, letting them to identify issues in their communities and then from there, develop an idea into a project for example. So it was a very practical program in showing them how to convert an idea into a proposal. How to write a proposal, how to write an application,
funding, budgeting and also communication. So we had practical examples all of them had to develop an idea and what they’d like to do within their communities. And how they would work on it from a budget to the (?) they would be working on and outcomes out of that. So at the end of it, what we’re having now and next step and even something that they can continue on their own is to have these ladies from different communities being CCD workers and working within their communities.

E: So it’s training them to be facilitators themselves, as artists or community workers...

M: Through Arts

E: What kind of arts...is it skills that they have already

M: It could be through things that their communities are already doing. For example it could be through music, dance, drama.

E: But they don’t necessarily have to be dancers or singers themselves but it’s more that they facilitate their communities to develop some creative project, depending on where the people in their communities want to go, but it’s developing arts programs?

M: Yes, it’s trying to identify the needs of the community and then develop that idea into an artistic project.

V: So they are more like facilitators. And these are not people... again they’re grassroots people. I mean a couple of them maybe have been a bit more professional, but generally they’re refugee women, and again I’ll put it out as an open process expressions of interest – who is out there just have to put their hand up. We’re really looking at again who’s out there doing these projects. Like when we say ‘who are the facilitators and who works culturally appropriately with these people?’ I think the more we actually empower people to take it on for themselves. So this was really a model and I think the first time I can see Australia working with refugee communities anyway to do something like this and in these communities it’s the women who are really strong. Often they’re single mothers who have come here. So they’ve already come a certain distance to get here in the first place. So they’re kind of wanting...many of the issues they were looking at is because of the fragility of their communities; they’re refugees, they don’t have any infrastructure. So what we were trying to do, was actually almost like a little shorthand to Australian society; the levels of government. Like understanding the processes; local government, state, federal. How you can tap into what’s out there and look at your own community needs. And so often it is things... ‘we’re losing our culture. We’ve already kind of all this stuff to get here, and how do we maintain our stories, our proverbs, our music, our dance?’ Everyone of them has all those issues I would say.

Magamase: So addresses most of the challenges that they are having in their communities. They are small and they are new. And they’re isolated especially the women. So most of them if not all in their cultures...one of the objectives was to at least take out women from isolation and bring them together.
E: So what future does this have? Is there an accreditation, do they get a qualification?

M: Yes, through...they have a certificate through TAFE.

E: CCD is that the title of the role?

V: I don’t think... it wasn’t quite a CCD thing. It was a Statement of Attainment for Employment and Educational opportunities. I think they can still use it as a little pathway thing.

E: A pathway to moving into working in community development, and maybe working in Local Councils?

V: Yes

E: Is that the idea?

V & M: Yes

E: But they don’t pay for this?

M: No

E: That opportunity was available with CCDNSW. Is that going to continue?

V: We’d like it to. And I think the TAFE was really supportive. So there might be other ways we can do it. We’re looking at... and each one of them developed this project idea so that there’s a possibility; it’s a fantastic idea so it’s a shame. Again it needs the (?) to apply for funding. It’s the small things; you don’t need a lot of money, sometimes like $2-3,000 to make something happen. Even if it’s a series of little workshops.

E: So will you follow these women once they’ve been qualified in what they do? Will that be a strategic kind of...?

V: There’s an evaluation happening which is an outside evaluation. In this case we got some money to do that, and so that’s happening. So that will be written up as case studies. And we’re trying to put it out there to say ‘this has happened so far.’ I can’t answer where it’s all going, because I just don’t know at this stage.

E: So it may not be through CCDNSW, but there will be a resource kit to assist in other people wanting to go in this area. But you don’t know who would be auspicing it?

V: Hopefully it will continue.

E: But if they don’t, there will be another avenue.
V: As I said to you before, I don’t think they’ll let it go so easily. It might change its shape a little bit. And I think the push will be to make it...I mean one of the things that’s been produced through us again, is a thing called the Prospectus which has to be launched sometime soon. But it’s about partnerships with businesses, community and business and that our Agency could be a brokering thing. That we go with ... ‘here’s a project and here’s a business’ and you can make a deal. So it can take on that kind of role.

E: And that’s a fairly new initiative that CCD is moving into business brokering? Do you feel that there’s a future for that?

V: I think probably there is.

E: So it hasn’t been a focus up until these recent changes, but there could be...

V: It’s been bubbling away. That’s been going on for about 2 years now.

E: So you have been actively involved in this?

V: Not me, no. They’ve just pulled together a document

E: That’s the prospectus?

V: Yeah

E: ...at the moment. You’re seeing how successfully these business collaborations could be worked out. So it’s ‘watch this space.’

V: But I think...what I’m thinking is...they need a peak, some organization with its focus in every state. I don’t think they’ll let that go so easily.

E: So this is the peak body still. So it’s just going to change focus or something? And you’ll be there to watch it, while you’re still working with this...

V: I don’t know. I’m just there until the end of this year. We’re finishing off these two documents basically. That’s what I’ve committed myself to. I don’t know what happens next year.

E: Ok then (to Magamase) Would you like to say anything else?

M: No

V: We’ve said lots.

E: We’ve covered everything. It’s really about culture and community and defining culture, and I think...
V: I think we do need to look for models of cross-cultural work in Australia. I think that’s something which interests me…we can really develop and promote… I think Australia has all this to offer the world as well.

E: Right, if we understand ourselves possibly because I think people do have different degrees of understanding of what ‘culture’ actually means. So would you say your definition is something that can be generally implemented across the board? Does how you see culture differ from how other...

V: Probably because what you were saying before…like all those women who have done the project, they’re all…I would say music and dance would be part of who they are. And so I don’t know if they would necessarily say that we need another skilled person to come and … you know what I mean, like it’s about how we sometimes make separations. Like communities have always had these things within them. And it’s about yeah, looking at those meanings today I suppose.

E: So really a culture is self defining. Like it’s maybe who comprise those communities that cultural definition comes out of those communities. They may not marry with another group

V: One of the strongest things that came out of this group…one woman got up and she said my project is going to be about Sabana. You know Sabana? Sabana is women who are in between the old and being young. They’re… how were they describing it? [to Magamase]

Magamase: You always have described youth and older women. But there is this group that is in between and they’re normally outcasted in their community.

E: Which country are we talking about?

V: Well a lot of these African...

M: Yeah and I think they would be under surveillance. Everything they do how they dress up, if they are wearing pants and their tops…dress like a teenager. And they’re expected to dress like, wear those African clothes even if they don’t want to. So they do not belong anywhere, So they feel like they are just unrecognized.

E: So this from their own community

M: Yes.

E: This is something that’s coming out of what you’re working…?

M: It just came out of…one woman and most of the communities they could identify with it – it happens everywhere.
V: So they wanted to actually develop a project around Sabana – that concept and that may be quite specific to that community. Maybe it’s not, maybe all middle age women have this kind of issue (laughs)...different name for it. So it was really interesting, it was really strong, and everybody really identified with it and kind of went ‘yes, we want to look at this stuff.’

M: Especially the single parents.

E: So is that something they’re doing now? Are you working with them to develop it?

V: No, this is where we were sort of saying to them, ‘this is how a project would develop.’ You would look at the issues, you would look at how you would actually explore it. Map it out. Write what your process would be. How would you actually...would you have 5 workshops, how you would budget. So they presented at the end of this last session, these are our project ideas. So all of these fantastic...

E: So you’re working with TAFE to get this accreditation. So it’s CCDNSW & TAFE and you present some of the modules, as well as TAFE

V: They just paid for the,...

E: So it’s CCDNSW that do the program delivery? Just you two?

V: No there’s a main facilitator who’s Paula Abood that’s been around.

E: From CCDNSW?

V: No she’s just employed, like contracted yeah...So I mean, what I’m saying is that some thing that’s culturally specific, I mean you need to work, you can’t just say ‘everything’s universal like that,’ Culture works in specific ways, but there are commonalities and I think it’s about looking at that commonality in diversity.

E: Because I think there’s a state in Australia at least that we have no cultural policy. And there is a polemic about ‘do we actually need one.’ I mean we’ve survived without a Cultural Policy, so why are we worrying about it now. So do you feel that that is something we need to identify, like Australia does have an identity and maybe it’s evolving and maybe it’s something that you can actually state and articulate. But is it something that we need to define and talk about, at least how a cultural policy is tied to identity?

V: There is a policy like that?

E: No, not a national one. Keating was the closest that came to actually articulating through Creative Nation...but it’s just been set aside...it’s not a documented policy that we recognize as ‘this is what is our Australian culture.’
V: I mean I think what he was offering was just something really exciting. And I think it was good to have that leadership, or that vision was coming from somewhere, from the top.

E: You’re talking about from the bottom. I mean grassroots?

V: As well but it allows maybe also that other crap not to happen. The stuff around racism now and lots of things have been allowed to slip away, and I guess it just prevented, or not prevented... I just felt a little bit more optimistic then

E: Then. I think a lot of people did, so maybe you are actually answering the question. Maybe we haven’t really looked at this and it’s something worth talking about and at least debating and trying to articulate?

V: But I’m not so close to things like the Scoping Study. I haven’t been analyzing that sort of stuff.

E: You weren’t part of the consultative process?

V: No. I chose not to be.

E: Oh ok.

V: Don’t have the time to...

E: You need to actually be doing lots of writing I think

V: Yeah

E: Submitting

V: I was just working with what I had in front of me. Other people have been doing that

E: And you’re happy with ...

V: I think it’s a strong thing and people have fought back and there’s a lot of solidarity out there. That’s what shocked people within the Australia Council. I don’t think they were expecting this kind of backlash from people

E: Having just read it in a cursory way, the rhetoric is pretty much...there is radical ness about it. About diversity, cultural diversity is very important and that has come out of it. So it seems that the report is recommending that communities need to be revisited as the place where creativity is actually happening. So they need to be fostered which means that it’s not about economic impacts, and how communities can be money making little enterprises. So that’s my reading of the report, which I must say I was really surprised to read that because I was expecting Creative industries everywhere. But I think the brokering and collaboration is something that’s being seen as an avenue, that that’s
where this sector’s going which I think you’ve said. This brokerage, the Prospectus...But I think there seems to be as you say some kind of glimmer of something coming out of that, that wasn’t expected?

V: I think the concern is you know the grassroots stuff continues to happen. I mean where the real work is. It’s all very well to...I suppose we need this umbrella. We need some support, we need people to understand the processes and the practice, but it’s about who does it and how they do it. And who’s you know...I think these sort of grassroots training...I mean I think that’s where I feel we really need to build because at the end of the day, you kind of go ‘oh, who is actually going to do that project?’ It’s all very well to go ‘let’s develop something’ but...

E: Like the guidance is there, but the people on the ground are the one’s that actually effect it and realize the ideas?

V: And also that they’re almost...they’ll probably end up saying ‘oh we’ll choose ten really interesting organizations which we feel are up to a certain level, and we’ll support them really well, and we’ll promote that and it will be all glossy and beautiful.’ But what happens to all the...and it’s sort of the way that a lot of the things have gone. Like Carnivale did something similar I think. Or it disappeared. But it’s really about sort of quality control or something...glossy

E: Professionalism?

V: Professional. But is that what this is about?

E: But I think what you’re talking about like training people at the grassroots...I mean that’s where you are developing skills. It is about education and these people are able to operate at that level of excellence, or whatever it is that people are looking at this sector and saying ‘well it is skills development.’ So the training is important.

V: I think the training is important and I think documenting and putting together is also important. I think there is...like why sell ourselves short. And I think everybody is looking much more critically at this stuff, the way information is presented to us.

E: So it is all about the information...?

V: Yeah, so I think we need to be better at doing some of that stuff too.

E: Within the sector? Not necessarily CCDNSW, but people in this sector

V: Sorry I keep jumping...yeah the broader sector. Because I think everyone is so busy just doing their stuff that you know they’re missing out. Like each one of our projects people are doing out there are really interesting; there’s an issue, there’s a story. It should come on television. And when you tell people in the broader community about this stuff they say ‘wow I never knew about that.’
E: So how should it be presented? Should it be like an evaluation study, and that you actually do present it as a text. Or...how should it be presented; what is the knowledge base that is out there? So how does it get presented? Is it in text so it sits on line and people can read it?

V: Yes I think so.

E: Does it have to be about text...reading?

V: Um, not necessarily I guess. I mean...I don’t know. I mean SBS could be doing a series of things...

E: Documentaries?

V: Yeah. And I guess one thing I was sort of interested was about how to get other languages happening. Other ways of telling stories. You know visual things. Giving people disposable cameras and getting them to document themselves. You know like maybe other ways of talking about things.

E: And it’s always with that underlying idea that you are presenting a knowledge and skills development and it might not be traditional non-art way I suppose. But it can go in to that audio-visual kind of...that’s pretty interesting. And I think people get excited about that too. It does develop ideas in other people where they grow and develop too.

V: Yes. And you know things are happening. Like these models...a couple of things Urban Theatre Projects did ‘Back Home’ which worked with community, and Sydney Festivals picked it up and now in the next Sydney Festival there’s going to be another community based theatre project. And ‘Back Home’ became the best selling or you know, it got the highest profile in the Sydney Festival last year. And that’s community based...so there are examples out there

E: And it’s about being creative in how you present your knowledge and your stories I suppose (pause). Thankyou very much for your time. I really appreciate that you’ve been so generous with me.

End of Tape
XI. Lyndon Raw Transcript

Lyndon Terracini, Artistic Festival Director CEO Brisbane Festival/Professional Singer
Recorded Telephone Interview
25 October, 2006

E: Hello Lyndon. You’re in Brisbane?

L: Yes, I am.

E: I might just start with the title of your position.

L: I’m the Artistic Director and CEO of Brisbane Festival.

E: How would you describe your role?

L: It’s a complex role and it’s a very varied sort of role in that I, obviously being Artistic Director, put together the whole program for the Brisbane Festival. But also being CEO I’m responsible for the money as well; both raising the money and making sure that we run to our budget. So in a number of other Arts organizations that isn’t often the case. But I think that’s the most responsible and efficient way for the head of an Arts organization to operate in that the Artistic Director should also be responsible for the money for a number of reasons: One because you as the head of the organization take responsibility for the company fiscally; and secondly if there is a project that you really want to do, then it’s up to you to find the money to do it.

E: Is it your sole responsibility or do you actually have administrative people that work with funding applications?

L: Yes we do funding applications. But I’m ultimately responsible for all of those, yes.

E: What are the funding challenges related to the vision that you have and the programs that you want to run? Is it about money that’s available or is it the application procedure in that they are arduous and long running?

L: No, I think Australia is really an affluent country and in my experience if you’ve got original ideas that have currency, you’ll get the money.

E: Do you ever have any problems where you don’t, or you can’t get the money?

L: Oh yes, there are times that people say no, but I mean the fact that we raised $6.5 million at the last festival, which is a massive increase on the previous festival. And at every festival I’ve worked at, we’ve always raised a lot of money. Yes, you win some
and you lose some, but ultimately if you put in the work and if the ideas are good enough, and you can deliver on those ideas, you’ll get the money.

E: Is it mostly government sources that you’re applying to, or private enterprise?

L: No, there’s a lot of private sponsorship and international partnerships with various companies. We get core funding from the government - but that’s on top of what we got in core funding.

E: In regards to the Creative Industries push where there seems to be quite a lot of pressure on cultural practitioners and professional artists to demonstrate the economic impact of their programs, does that factor in what you do?

L: In what sense?

E: To actually get funding, you need to demonstrate that you can pull in an audience and that you can make money out of the enterprise.

L: My feeling is that the Festival is funded by tax payers and if we aren’t playing to as many people in the community as possible, then we’re being irresponsible. So I don’t look at it in terms of trying to justify what we do with a funding application. I look at a larger picture in that we’ll create work, but I think it is important to make the ticket prices as low as possible if not free, so that as many people in the community have the opportunity to come to see what we’re doing.

E: Does that impact on your ability to get money if you do make it free, for instance in terms of how you can access funding?

L: Oh it’s a bonus. If I can make it free, I’ll get more sponsorship money.

E: So the people who are funding the projects aren’t necessarily looking for a return for them?

L: No, this is usually private sponsorship. For example when I invited Mikhail Gorbachev to come and host this Earth Dialogues Brisbane which was a world forum for sustainable development, climate change and so on, I made the whole event free over the weekend. We had Nobel Peace Laureates here. It was hosted by Gorbachev and Premier Beattie, it was free so that anyone could come and bring their children to hear Mikhail Gorbachev speak for nothing. Whereas in the past when Bill Clinton comes or someone like that, it’s $1500 a ticket.

E: Who actually funded the Earth Dialogues?

L: We raised the money to do it.

E: So it wasn’t anything to do with ticketing?
L: No. We didn’t sell one ticket. We gave them away. People had to book so we knew how many people were coming, so they had to ring QPack but we also paid the inside ticket charges.

E: I’m aware that your singer, but how would you describe your arts training background?

L: In terms of administration?

E: Professional arts.

L: I’ve been a professional musician since I was about 21 I think. Initially, playing in pubs in Sydney as a jazz musician. I was a backing singing, did a lot of TV commercials in Sydney and films and that sort of thing. Then I went to the Opera School, and from 1974 until the present day, I’ve been an Opera singer, singing all over the world. And in 1993 I started NORPA, Northern Rivers Performing Arts in Lismore which is a multi-art form organization and so I learnt how to run a company there. Then I ran the Qld Music Festival from 2000 until 2005, and then the Brisbane Festival in 2006.

E: I’m also interested in knowing how creative expression impacts on people personally and also professionally. Have you got any insight how singing has impacted on you personally?

L: Singing is a wonderful physical expression in that for anyone if they’re feeling a bit depressed or something like that, if they have a good sing they feel much much better; it must release endorphins or something – I don’t know what it does. And so the physical act of singing is naturally a joyous experience. And so that certainly impacts on people, particularly if you involve people in communities that haven’t participated in that form of activity before, you do find a marked difference in how they respond, yes.

E: You founded NORPA?

L: Yes

E: So you have extensive background and experience in community arts practice?

L: Yes

E: On enabling individual capacity, based on your experience of community arts practice, how do cultural practitioners seek to develop collective creative expression, and how does that impact on people personally?

L: Yes, I think I’d probably define community arts activity differently to most other people, in that what I like to do is go to a place, get a feel for the culture of that particular place, and create work which is about the culture of that place. Because then it really resonates with the people that live there; they have a very strong connection to it. I guess a couple of examples are when I did Bob Cat Magic in Mt Isa; Mt Isa is a heavy
machinery town and everyone in that town is connected to heavy machinery. So we created a big piece that used 20 tonne excavators performing a love duet and dancing bob cats, and had a lot of people from Mt Isa involved in that show. Over the 3 nights, 18,000 people came to see the show out of a town of 22,000. Because it was about them, it was about their place and about the culture of their place.

E: I’m looking at examples of how culture is generated through community arts practice. Do you know the process of how culture is made by these type of creative expressions?

L: Well no I think it’s the opposite. The culture determines what you do. The culture of the place determines what you should be creating in that place. I wouldn’t do a show like Bob Cat Magic in Noosa because it’s not about the culture of that place. So for me, it’s the opposite way around – the culture determines what you do.

E: Looking at Bob Cat Magic, it was going in, seeing what the culture of the place was, and then developing an initiative around the locality and the people?

L: It’s more creating a piece that reflects the culture of that place. It’s identifying what that culture is and what it’s about, and creating work that really reflects that, so people understand the connection to where they live.

E: And in terms of people who aren’t professional artists, who haven’t got an arts practice background, how do you get these people involved in a community arts project?

L: Well we had a lot of people in that show that had never done a show in their lives, bob cat drivers for example. When they saw a rehearsal, they loved the show, and then everybody wanted to be in it. And again because it connected with them. A month before Bob Cat Magic was on, Oz Opera toured Rigoletto to Mt Isa – 18 people went to the show. 18,000 came to Bob Cat Magic, and then when we did it 2 years later, we did a new piece Bob Cat Dancing, was the same response.

E: There was a follow up on the first show?

L: Yes

E: Apart from that, from your observation what other kinds of impact would something like that have had on the town?

L: It gives people an enormous sense of pride. It also validates for them the culture of their place whereas they don’t have to feel that their culture is second best. In Charters Towers we created a big musical called Charters Towers the Musical with similar response there; all sorts of places. I adapted Peter Weir’s film The Cars Ate Paris as a big outdoor rock musical in Lismore and used a lot of feral kids in that show, and then toured to Perth and Adelaide; but it worked best in Lismore because it was about that feral culture at that place.
E: How important is creative expression in the ordinary. Like a show gives focus to a creative program, but how important is creative expression in the everyday of peoples’ lives?

L: I think the important difference is that with those pieces, it’s not just bringing in a show. It’s actually making the show in that town with those people; having a script written, a new piece, new music, everything. Everything is actually about that place, and it’s made in that place. Touring a show in, there’s no value in that, and I don’t support it at all, and Rigoletto is a great example of it. And how does it affect people in their everyday lives after participated in something like that? Well they see bob cats very differently. They see bob cats as performers, they see them as musical instruments, they see them as dancers, and I think that’s a terrific thing.

E: So the impact after the show would be a sense of pride, a heightened sense of being proud in where you live, who you are; is that related to identity?

L: I think it’s related to cultural identity, yes. I mean there’s a lot of press about it all over the country and so they can say to their friends ‘I was in Bob Cat Magic’ ‘Yes I saw that on Television’ or whatever. And that certainly gives them a great sense of achievement, a great sense of pride about where they live, about who they are, and about the sort of art if they would use that term that they make.

E: Does Australia need a cultural policy?

L: It needs a decent one.

E: I’m trying to articulate what that means for people who are at the coal face, and working with communities and looking at the different localities and who have a very good idea of how the different places that they go into and develop these shows around, the culture that’s already existing there. How would you articulate...?

L: I don’t think that a cultural policy for Australia makes sense because every town and every city has its own culture. And you need to identify all of those cultures and in larger cities there are a myriad of different cultures. You need to identify exactly what those cultures are and address those cultures, and they all make up this extraordinary mosaic or tapestry. In all the different suburbs of every city, their different cultures.

E: So do we have a fairly clear idea of our identity as Australians?

L: No I don’t think we do.

E: How do you think we address that issue?

L: I don’t think there is such a thing as an Australian identity. It’s far more complex than that. It depends...someone who comes from Cooktown for example has a very different view of the world than someone who comes from Sydney. So, their identity is very, very different. Even though they live in the same country, they have a different identity; they
have a different cultural identity, the way they view the world is different. In some places, if you come from South Australia for example, your accent is different. It’s too simplistic to talk about an Australian identity I think.

E: What is the thing that keeps a cohesive sense of who we are? Is there anything that bonds us at all?

L: Language I think, in that with a continent as large as Australia is, to have one language that most of the population speaks is very unusual in the world. English is the dominant language by far, and that binds people together I think.

E: With communities that actually do have a sense of identity that is based on a language which is not English, and I know that this is very strong, I’m not sure if this is the case in Brisbane, but certainly in Sydney there are different local communities...

L: Exactly, that’s what I’m saying. Somewhere like the Western suburbs of Sydney, they’re different cultures in those suburbs; there’s a Vietnamese culture, there’s a Lebanese culture and those suburbs are very, very different cultures.

E: And where there is this diversity, what is the commonality or the thing unifies people that are so different?

L: Well that’s what you have to find out, and you have to go into those suburbs and really spend time there and really figure out what makes them tick, and that can be...sometimes that can be very easy. Sometimes it can be very difficult to identify.

E: And the place of community arts in that process?

L: Well community arts I think has had pretty bad press and some of it I have to say, is it’s own making. As I said, for me making art in communities is a more accurate expression I think.

E: I’m not sure if we’re talking about Community Cultural Development here, that actually is something that is being dissolved, or going through a renewal or a reinvention, is that what you’re saying? Because I’m looking at CCD as a theoretical process which articulates how you build community. Are you saying that it’s more than that?

L: Yes I am. And again I think it’s all connected to the culture of each particular place; having a very broad policy where one fits all can’t work, and it will never work. And the examples we just spoke about in the different suburbs in Sydney, they’re the really extreme examples of it. But those differences exist in every town and in every city in Australia in more subtle guises often, but nevertheless they certainly exist. I mean the culture of Brisbane is a very different culture to Sydney.

E: Do you think there is a difference between professional artworks to people who identify more as community artworks? For instance if you’re a professional artist as
opposed to someone who says ‘I’m there to activate and facilitate community. Is there a difference?’

L: I don’t think there should be. I know there is, or we’ve structured it so that there is. I don’t think that there should be a difference in fact, I think the whole notion of amateur and professional activity should be broken down too. It’s either about good or bad work. I don’t like those divisions being set up.

E: When you say good or bad with Rigoletto is obviously is a good work, but if 18 people come, is it good or bad, or you can put something like Bob Cat Magic on and you get thousands of people coming. Is that the indicator of what good or bad is that we’re looking at?

L: In some circumstances it is. Not in every circumstance. Yes, there’s no question that Rigoletto isn’t a good work. The point is it doesn’t connect to that culture.

E: How would you define the difference between amateur and professional?

L: I don’t. That’s what I mean, there’s either, you can define it as a standard of amateur standard or a work of professional standard, but I prefer to say no, it was either good or it wasn’t good.

E: So who determines what’s good and what’s not?

L: There are number of different criteria. I mean if 18,000 people in a town of 22,000 come to see a show, then there must be something good about it. It may not be as musically sophisticated as Rigoletto for example. But that doesn’t mean it’s any less deserving of being presented. And I would suggest too that the level of funding that goes to a tour like Rigoletto that’s playing over Australia, the same level of funding should go to creating a piece like Bob Cat Magic.

E: With those people who do apply for funding which is becoming increasingly more difficult to get, especially when it comes to community arts practice and justifying what you’re doing and all the indicators that people are looking at. What do people who have got a good idea and are not able to get funding to develop a community arts project, what do those people do?

L: It’s difficult for me to say because I don’t know the projects, I don’t know the people, and I don’t know the applications that they write. There could be many reasons why that isn’t funded. I wouldn’t be able to comment really because every application is different, and it may seem like a good idea to people, but if it doesn’t have resonance with the community, it’s probably not a good idea.

E: So is it that funding is tied to indicators people look at about what is a good project as against a project that is not as good?
L: Again it’s difficult to say because perhaps the application itself wasn’t very well put together. Perhaps it wasn’t expressed very well. Maybe the ideas that whoever was applying for the money had, weren’t communicated particularly well. So there are all sorts of reasons.

E: What are your views on Arts Policy on community arts program and whether something happens or not?

L: Yes I think an implemented policy can have a good effect or a very bad effect. I don’t agree with the policy of spending a lot of money on touring shows and very little money on making new work that’s about a particular place. I think that’s actually wrong and all the figures will tell you that it’s wrong, but touring will continue to be funded purely and simply that’s what they’ve always done.

E: Do you think the Australia Council is getting it right in terms of the funding and the criteria?

L: I think closing the Community Cultural Development Unit was a very bad mistake. And I think the Australian Stories as an initiative is a very good thing. So yes, some things they do extremely well and Australian Stories is one of them.

E: Is there confusion between what’s an Arts Policy and what’s a Cultural Policy?

L: I don’t think there should be an Arts Policy. I think there should be a Cultural Policy that identifies the myriad of different cultures in Australia, because art comes out of culture. Art will be what it is, and you can’t determine that, but if you acknowledge all of the different cultures, then art has a stimulus and a foundation to work from.

E: Is that the thing that’s not being understood in terms the closure of CCD?

L: Yes I think so. It’s not understanding that if you take away the base of the pyramid or the base of the building, ultimately it’s going to fall down.

E: So we’re looking at art as how you’re seeing which is going to a locality, working out by observation and talking to people what the culture is, and then you understand something that’s going on in that locality?

L: That’s right

E: So art comes out of that?

L: Yes. Look who knows whether a piece you create will become a work of art, it may not. I mean how many great pieces are there? And if a piece does have some sort of universal resonance coming out of that culture, wonderful. If it doesn’t, that doesn’t matter, you know we’re so hung up about everything having to be a masterpiece, it doesn’t matter. If it connects with people; if the people who live in that particular place, and that place may be Sydney, may be something they see at the Opera House; it may be
Winton. It doesn’t really matter, as long as the work that’s being made connects with people in some way.

E: We’re getting close to an understanding of what art is where so many people like John Carey are grappling with this question, What is a work of Art? Perhaps it is just a connection with people that maybe other people come along and say ‘that’s not of any value’ but then 18,000 people will turn up which is judged by others who may think that they have a higher value of what that work is. I suppose I’m trying to understand your definition of a work of art, which is connecting with people?

L: I can’t give you one because I don’t think there is a definition. It’s something that you’re aware of and to try and define why it’s a work of art, I think is impossible.

E: So it’s something that’s a personal understanding or realization or is something that happens collectively?

L: It can be a collective realization as well, yes. But if you’re asked to say for example ‘why is the Mona Lisa a work of art?’ Well I don’t know, I can’t tell you. Why is Beethoven’s 5th Symphony a work of art? Because Beethoven was a genius and the music is extraordinary. Ok well that’s fine, but does that mean it’s a work of art?

E: So if you put on a piece and only 5 people turn up to it, does that say it’s not a work of art, or it’s just not understood, or people haven’t been educated to understand it?

L: I don’t agree with the whole notion of people being educated to understand something which is why when people say to me ‘out of those 18,000 people next time a lot of them will go to Rigoletto’ as though that’s why you do Bob Cat Magic, so that people will go to Rigoletto. No you don’t. Who cares if they never go to Rigoletto, it’s not important. The important thing, is if that work that’s being created connects with people. If it connects with one person, terrific.

E: Just looking at art and how it actually does facilitate skills development for example like music and singing, that there is a journey that you do go on and you start off not knowing much, and because develop skills that is an educational journey.

L: It is, and if people want to go on that journey, that’s fantastic, fabulous. If they don’t, I don’t think that should matter. Look, pop music is really primitive, you know 3 chords and you can play most pop songs. But that doesn’t mean that it’s not valid.

E: How much is opportunity and access related to developing creative skills?

L: Usually if people are genuinely talented it doesn’t matter where they are, they’ll find a way. There’s a guy John Rogers for example, who’s a wonderful violinist, guitarist and composer – in fact he wrote the music for Bob Cat Magic – he plays with the Australian Art Orchestra, he was the principal violinist at the Qld Conservatorium in their
Orchestra; he’s up in Cooktown. It’s a tiny little community way up in North Qld without a tarred road to it, incredibly isolated, and he’s an extremely talented musician.

E: Do you think that there is a link between access and opportunity and skills development and being able to actualize and realize a talent?

L: People who are genuinely talented will do it, it doesn’t matter where they are or what sort of access they have. In terms of a general education for a larger percentage of the population, yes of course access and the ability to be exposed to new things is obviously extremely beneficial, yes.

E: How much is that happening in so far as what you can see, that people have access to creative development?

L: I think everyone who has got a computer and the internet has access to virtually anything now. The amount of access that people have to information, to anything, is just extraordinary now.

E: Is that in reference to hybrid arts?

L: No necessarily. You can go online and buy any CD that you want. You can go online and see any movie that you want. You can buy any book that you want. You can buy a different score. I don’t think there are any limitations to it at all.

E: If you take the stance that you can develop your own skills level, then you can because you’ve got access – it’s not about money – you’ve got access in that you can get the equipment and you can develop your own talent to the level you can, which you’re capable of doing?

L: Yes. It’s whether people really want to do it or not. If they really want to do it, they’ll find a way. Particularly now with the access, as I mentioned with the net, and computers, it’s just phenomenal.

E: What my research is finding is that there’s been a merging of what has been seen as the traditional artist with the new creative practitioner who is the innovator, who is not necessarily in that traditional role as an artist, but they might just be into design etc., but they are seen as artists in the new sense, that they are the new creators.

L: Yes sure. All the making of art evolves dependent on the contemporary culture of the time. It just so happens now that the contemporary culture is based around computers, the internet and digital technology. So of course Art will come out of that culture. And that’s what I was saying before culture determines whether or not people make art. You can’t impose art on to a particular place or time. You can try, but it won’t work.

E: Are you satisfied with the operational aspects of your position, or do you have ideal of developing what you are doing further?
L: No, I need to have a different sort of structure, because the festival is growing enormously, and I need a different sort of structure to cope with that growth. I think the traditional structure of arts organizations is primitive and extremely old fashioned. I mean business restructures every 18 months, and arts organizations rarely if ever, do.

E: Is that looking at partnerships and collaborations?

L: No I meant administratively.

E: So it needs to be innovated?

L: Yes very much so.

E: Is it happening anywhere, or is it something that has to be reinvented?

L: Not that I know of.

E: Do you have any ideas of how that is going to happen?

L: Yes. I advocate a modular system rather than an Artistic Director General Manager. But I advocate probably not having a General Manager, but having Directors of Departments that are responsible for those departments so that the flow of information is much broader and you eliminate the bottle neck, or gate keeper.

E: What are the barriers to realizing this?

L: I don’t think there are barriers. It’s just figuring out how you do it and whether you want to do it or not.

E: Time, energy and commitment?

L: Yes exactly.

E: It’s not about money?

L: No it’s not about money. People say there’s no money to do projects and all that sort of thing. It’s very rarely about money.

E: It’s about vision?

L: Exactly as you said.

E: Vision and having an innovation into something that’s been done and is not working or just working at a substandard level.
L: Just thinking about what you do. Most people don’t think about what they’re doing. They just do it because that’s always how they’ve done it. And if you keep doing what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always had.

E: Is that like thinking with a group of people, or is it having a person at the helm who is a Director who says “this is how it should be”?

L: I think it varies. Some people find it much more stimulating working with other people. Others find it more stimulating to have time on their own to think things through.

E: It depends on the individual in a position of responsibility?

L: Yes.

E: So one style doesn’t fit all?

L: No, exactly. And I think that is exactly right about the work that we make, how we make it, how you run an organization; one style doesn’t fit all. One style that fits all is McDonalds. And once you’re into that, you see the same show all over the world. And who wants to do that?

E: Do we have more chance of doing that in a country like Australia? Are there more opportunities that we have because we are the way that we are?

L: Yes I think so. I think we have tremendous opportunities. To just look at old European models and say, ‘maybe that doesn’t work. Maybe there’s a better way to do it.’ For example you’ll find French wine makers will get American oak barrels and age their wine in American oak barrels for 3 years and so on. Australian wine makers will get a shovel full of oak chips and throw it in the barrel, it has the same effect. So it’s just thinking about things differently. What is it you’re trying to get out of it? Ok you want a bit more oak taste in the wine, well throw a shovel of oak chips in – you haven’t to buy a barrel.

E: So the shape of the country from what you’re saying, is that we are in good shape because we have a diversity of voice; we’re not stuck...

L: No, we’re trying to homogenize everything and I think the Arts are far too regulated.

E: Are we talking about an American style of homogenizing?

L: I just think it’s a convenient way for governments to control every aspect of what we do. If it’s homogenized, then gee it’s easy. If it’s extremely diverse, then it’s not.

E: It’s not about a government model of organization and management. Is it about individual enterprise and being able to develop models that are outside of government control?
L: Yes, I think we should always strive to have really original ideas, and to act on those ideas.

E: It sounds like you’re in that position because you’re not completely funded by government funding, so you are able to...

L: I could be it’s just that I choose to make the festival much bigger, and to make it bigger I’ve got to find the money.

E: But that gives you freedom of being able to operate the way that you see could happen, which I would imagine wouldn’t happen if you had government accountability?

L: Oh we still have very tight government accountability, but again it’s up to every individual; if they want to raise more money, they can do what they want to do. If they don’t want to raise the money, then you won’t be able to do what you want to do, and all you can do is sit there and whinge and complain because there’s not enough money to do it. If you want to do it, you raise it. In the States there’s no money, and people just have to get out there and raise it.

E: What I am finding with people working in government organizations is that their hands are tied in terms of not being able to do anything other than what they’re being told to do...

L: What sort of organizations do you mean?

E: I suppose I’m looking at local councils

L: Oh yes

E: Cultural development workers

L: Yes, well if you’re in a Council structure, then you can’t go out and raise a lot of money no, I understand that.

E: So you need to be almost developing your own enterprise, but from the ground up

L: Yes

E: And it has to be new and something that you’re going to start yourself?

L: yes I think so. If you’re going to make a piece, it should be really clear about who it’s connected to and why you’re making it.

E: Is that how you’ve come to the position that you’re in now?
L: Yes I think so yes. I mean knowing why you want to do something; if you know all that then you’ll be passionate about it and nothing will stop you doing it. You’ll find the money.

E: So having a creative artistic understanding of how these projects work, and how culture works. I mean what I am finding is that there are many people working in the cultural industries who tend to have a fairly bureaucratic and administrative approach, but it’s having that individual, like yourself who has been practicing in an art, and also worked in community and that gives you the vantage point of being able to see outside the square, and see the possibilities which are constrained by other processes that stop other people from seeing something bigger than where they are at.

L: Yes, I think that’s true.

E: Well I think that answers my question about innovation and creativity

L: That’s good

E: That’s terrific Lyndon. Thankyou very much for your time.

L: It’s a pleasure.