Migration Action is Australia’s only national independent journal devoted to refugee, immigration and multicultural issues. Published three times a year by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, it is edited by the Ecumenical Migration Centre, which has a 40-year history of leadership in this field. Since 1974 Migration Action has been a trusted information source, providing in-depth critical analysis and alternative views informed by casework and relationships with the communities affected by the issues. It seeks to promote informed discussion among decision-makers and the general public.
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Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC)

The EMC works with recently arrived emerging communities, as well as longer-settled disadvantaged groups, for their full access and participation in the benefits of Australian society. At the same time, the Centre works towards the Brotherhood of St Laurence’s vision of a reconciled Australia free of poverty and discrimination.

The Centre achieves this by:
- strengthening families, communities and their organisations (through complex casework and counselling, community development, and organisational support for new and emerging communities)
- challenging and shaping responsive service provision (through service development, advice, information and special projects across a range of sectors)
- influencing public opinion and public policy (through advocacy, policy analysis, advice to government and community education)
- learning, through its relationships with recently arrived communities, to act as a centre of knowledge and experience (through information, consultation and advice, documentation, action research and publications).

Front cover artwork

The story block on the front cover was created by D. Al Battat, a participant in Between Memory and Hope … Tears for the Future, an Iraqi women’s storytelling and quilt art project. The project was jointly auspiced by Mercy Hospital for Women and Northern (now Spectrum) Migrant Resource Centre, running between 2004 and 2006. Between Memory and Hope comprised four aspects: women telling their stories (with support from creative writer Wahibe Moussa), compiled into a bilingual publication; women creating individual textile story blocks, combined into six quilts (with support from textile artist Jan Lowe); photo documentary of artists at work (by Rachel Lowe); a travelling exhibition with women artists speaking at exhibition openings across Victoria and interstate. Ferial Ali, an Iraqi woman artist, resourced each stage of the project. One of the participants expressed, ‘The project was comforting … almost like talking about a dream but putting it in artistic form’. On completion of the exhibitions, the quilts were gifted by the Iraqi women to Mercy Hospital for Women, Heidelberg, where they now hang permanently.

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INSIDE BACK COVER    THE TWO FISHERMEN
As a platform from which refugee voices can be heard, the arts are perhaps the leading media for community members to represent their own stories, without having to rely on representative agencies.

Arts practitioners often begin new projects by manufacturing an environment devoid of prior influence, an empty space or blank page. By beginning with a vacuum, they maximise the possibility of free and creative expression. The process can be both difficult and wonderful. As the ideas flow in, they must be assessed, sorted, assembled and refined; many choices must be made, and each choice has a dramatic effect on the end result, a work of art.

Refugees arrive in this country often with rich cultural backgrounds and definitive experiences as both workers and members of a community, but migration to a new land often has the effect of negating these backgrounds and experiences, as refugees discover that their qualifications are not valid, their work history is not recognised and their traditional roles are increasingly compromised.

The arts can be of critical importance as a vehicle for the reassembling of these shattered identities, a safe place in which no emotion cannot be expressed, no point of view not represented. As a platform from which refugee voices can be heard, the arts are perhaps the leading media for community members to represent their own stories, without having to rely on representative agencies. The status of the arts as a powerful tool for healing through expression of ‘story’ and for confirming and acknowledging identity has long been recognised and documented. Its ability to bring communities together, to facilitate cultural exchange and to encourage harmonious community relationships is recognised in this arts and culture edition of Migration Action 2009.

A Brotherhood of St Laurence research and policy paper entitled Putting people in the picture: The role of arts in social inclusion (2005) found that ‘There is significant evidence that arts initiatives and activities play a role in achieving social inclusion outcomes for disadvantaged individuals, groups and communities ... the arts are being employed in diverse ways to empower individuals, heal communities, foster social connections, create employment and encourage educational participation’.

At the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) conference held in Sydney in March this year, the Brotherhood of St Laurence’s General Manager for Research and Policy, Paul Smyth, described social inclusion as a banner phrase in political discourse that masks an empty suitcase in need of content. This edition of Migration Action contends that the arts deserve a place in the case as an important enabler of social inclusion for diverse communities.

Reference
Jill Morgan has worked extensively in multicultural and Indigenous arts in Australia. Jill is presently the Executive Officer of Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV) and was previously the Executive Director of Kulcha, Multicultural Arts of Western Australia. She has a broad knowledge of current multicultural and arts policy and is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all Australians, including newly emerged communities, and the right of all Australians to express and share their cultural heritage through the arts. Multicultural Arts Victoria shares common ground with both ethnic communities and the arts sector. Working in partnership with many of Victoria’s leading multicultural artists, communities and arts agencies, MAV is positioned strategically between both sectors—providing an important bridge between Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, artists, the arts industry and audiences.

MA: What role do arts programs play in the social inclusion of people from refugee and migrant backgrounds?

The arts play a vitally important role in the social inclusion of people of refugee and migrant backgrounds. Culture and identity are central to the wellbeing of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Arts programs are an active and tangible way to connect cultures and to educate others about difference.

Part of the social inclusion process for Multicultural Arts Victoria is working with other organisations, local government authorities and the local community in an effort to actively promote diversity through the arts. Vital to this process is providing a welcoming environment for refugees and sharing with others how to actively include all the community in arts and cultural activities. Cultural activities promote social inclusion by recognising the importance of refugee and migrant values and beliefs. Arts programs that present positive non-stereotyped images and stories of migrant and refugee groups play a vital role in ensuring equity.

All programs presented by MAV are built on an ethos of social inclusion. Events such as the Black Harmony Gathering ensure new pathways into the arts for emerging, refugee and Indigenous Australian artists and speak out against racism and disadvantage. Events like this demonstrate the important role arts projects have in building self-worth, community pride and empowerment for people of refugee and migrant backgrounds. The arts enable artists and communities to create dialogue and discussion in order to raise awareness of the inequity that exists.

MAV, through the arts, supports members of migrant and refugee groups to have power over their lives and to be profiled in well-produced cultural platforms and events. With this support a new generation of leaders will be created: leaders who are not ‘ashamed’ of their identity and have a distinct cultural voice.
MA: How is creative and artistic expression suited to the social inclusion agenda?

Multicultural Arts Victoria runs an extensive mentorship program that supports the social inclusion agenda by establishing a respect for the skills within communities and linking with established artists to create pathways for artistic expression and community participation.

The Visible mentorship program develops and presents high-quality art that challenges inaccurate beliefs or stereotypes about refugees and Indigenous Australians, allowing for new work to be created that voices—through music and the arts—the issues faced by these communities.

Through projects such as the Visible program, MAV brings together groups that normally would not work together to create understanding between cultures and the wider community and reduce inter-racial conflict and misunderstanding, ensuring greater social acceptance. The project brings different communities with a commonality of purpose together through mentorship and performance.

MA: What strategies are used to encourage people from emerging and longer-settled communities to participate in and access arts programs?

To encourage migrant and refugee communities to participate in programs, it is vital to have an advocate to ensure translation of policy into active programs. MAV acts as this bridge, helping to make connections and advising different government departments and bodies how to do this. There is currently a Ministerial Multicultural Policy Advisory Committee, which will lead to the development of strategies through the facilitation of funding and grant opportunities. Creating impact on arts policy agenda is a core strategy for opening up opportunities for emerging and longer-settled communities to access arts programs.

MAV’s Mix It Up program, a partnership with the Arts Centre, is about engaging with and reflecting the cultural diversity of Victoria through high-profile music events with culturally diverse emerging and established artists. One of the keys to the success of developing a program such as Mix It Up is to acknowledge and find skills within communities in such areas as marketing, programming and networking. Finding the cultural leaders in communities is critical. Organisational cultural change within large organisations such as the Arts Centre can also be achieved, as demonstrated by the Mix It Up program. Having champions of change who are brave cultural warriors is vitally important.
MA: What are some of the challenges in programming and promoting new and emerging artists or communities?

The key challenge in programming and promoting emerging multicultural artists is that mainstream presenters and producers will not take risks with new and emerging artists and products—what they consider ‘untried’ work, outside their perceptions of ‘mainstream’ public tastes. These issues have been constantly raised by emerging refugee artists and communities, and it is clear that they do not have the resources and support structures to address this alone. The problem is highlighted through the lack of professional-quality events that provide professional production infrastructure for emerging artists and communities.

One of the problems that MAV is addressing is the lack of performance experience of emerging refugee artists—in a real sense, it is a lack of representation. Organisations such as MAV play a pivotal role in providing opportunities that meet the needs identified by emerging refugee communities through projects such as the Emerge Festival and Visible Mentoring Program. If organisations such as MAV did not give these unknown artists a voice, they would not have the opportunities and recognition they deserve as artists and representatives of the community.
MA: How are social inclusion outcomes assessed or evaluated by Multicultural Arts Victoria?

The primary indicator for social inclusion outcomes in the arts is active involvement in the programs by emerging and established artists and communities. MAV sees participation as an important aspect and has endeavoured to be relevant to communities, whether they are established or emerging.

MAV regularly consults with the community. A needs analysis in the arts, facilitated by the Victorian Multicultural Commission and MAV, revealed that certain perceptions about the multicultural arts sector are strongly felt, particularly in relation to the under-resourcing and under-representation of the multicultural arts sector. The needs analysis also revealed that MAV remains the recognised peak agency for the sector by government and the community. While government provides funding and support to the multicultural arts sector, the sector nevertheless remains a peripheral area in terms of policy, funding and resourcing, particularly in the context of Victoria’s standing as a vibrant, culturally diverse society. For migrant and refugee communities, there is a strong expectation that the sector’s potential be maximised through proper utilisation of partnerships and appropriate resourcing of organisations such as MAV, which will facilitate and track the achievement of social inclusion outcomes in an artistic context.

MAV works locally and has also toured work internationally and nationally. It has worked professionally in partnership with leaders in the arts in Melbourne as well as at a grassroots level. Collaborations with key organisations in Victoria including the Arts Centre and Melbourne Festival are a measure of MAV’s leadership role in the arts in the state in ensuring participation of CALD artists. Essential to the success of these events is the involvement of migrant and refugee communities in the conception, development and presentation of the projects. The involvement of artists and community members in every stage of the project allows for increased participation and continuing involvement in all aspects of the artistic process.

While the social and cultural benefits of our diversity have been acknowledged broadly, the real and potential benefits have not been effectively optimised. Potentially one of the most powerful mediums through which to facilitate a more socially cohesive and inclusive society, the arts is an area that still needs some more work and resourcing.
Unfurling relationships

Thoughts on filmmaking with community

Paola Bilbrough, Filmmaker

‘More than other discursive forms, narrative demands an effort of interpretation. Following a story means more than listening: it means filling in the blanks, both between events and between the larger point they add up to …’ Francesca Polletta, It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics

‘I want to join the group but my heart feels a bit scared.’ Isiah, 14 years old

I first met Isiah through ‘In My Shoes’, a film project I directed in Braybrook in 2006, and his words have come back to me again and again. He felt them deeply and so did I; my response could so easily have been ‘My heart feels the same way’.

Creating art in a community context with both creative and advocacy goals is a risky, potentially life-changing business for all participants (artists and community) and success relies on a degree of vulnerability. So much of what unfurls or unravels depends on relationships—both old and new—and people’s willingness to accept that the finished product will be largely mysterious until close to the end.

‘Lullabies Our Mothers Sang’ is a documentary project (auspiced by the New Hope Foundation and funded by Arts Victoria) with 15 women from southern Sudan and a team of artists. It examines relationships through the lens of parental and cultural legacies. It asks the question ‘what do people choose to take from their families of origin and what do they leave behind?’.

Anghere, who is both translator and storyteller, has quipped numerous times ‘Family? Number one enemy’. And it is this ambivalence and frustration that often provides the most vivid narrative material. We have been meeting and recording songs and stories since October 2008 and I am aware that although the project has to end, that ‘end’ will be somewhat arbitrary because what people want to express, both as individuals and collectively, is like a river in its enormity.

‘Lullabies’ has its origins in a narrative project that Chrisoula Kanaris and I facilitated in 2006. For three months, a group of women met weekly and shared memories of their lives before they came to Australia. These memories became a book entitled Coffee Means Deep Conversation. Chrisoula, a settlement worker at the New Hope Foundation, is one of the most responsive people I know and through conversations with community she realised that valuable personal and cultural history is often lost in Australia; more frequently, it is the stories of trauma that are aired.

In the first sessions, a few women sang spontaneously and hearing these songs inspired others to tell stories of childhoods in Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. I listened, wrote furiously and then read back what I had captured. One woman commented, ‘We have not had much of an opportunity to share our stories in public before … we speak to our family and friends but in public it can feel exposing. Now, I understand it differently; it can be a way of being clear about ourselves to others’.

At the book launch of Coffee Means Deep Conversation, people were excited by the beauty of their own words in print—but there was a sense that this was only the beginning; many of those who had not been involved wanted the opportunity to share their stories. Recalling the woman who had sung a lullaby in Dinka one afternoon and said, ‘That is all I have of my mother’, I knew that print was the
In the moment of telling, people had forgotten to be afraid and were there wholeheartedly.

Wrong medium for a second project. I reflected on the limited presence of African-Australian women in the media in contrast to their vibrant presence on the streets of Footscray and St Albans and wondered what narrative they would choose to present on film—how they might want to be viewed.

‘In My Shoes’ participants had initially thought that they might be remaking The Matrix or starring in a Bollywood extravaganza. Over time, they recognised the power of their own daily dramas: public transport fines, family, school, discrimination. Dayane Stanovic (co-facilitator) and I started a collection. Some contributions were wry commentaries on a society full of contradictions and others bald personal statements. I treasured them all; in the moment of telling, people had forgotten to be afraid and were there wholeheartedly.

‘I was waiting at a bus stop in Footscray and my sister was standing in everyone’s way and this old white guy hit her with his walking stick and told her she should go back home. I looked at him and said, “Where? Broadmeadows? We were born here”. The guy sounded like he had an Italian accent.’

‘I got a behaviour card at school. I bashed some kids. I don’t know why.’

These narratives and others eventually became the basis of seven short films, with the bulk of the filming being completed almost as the project was due to end. In contrast, many of the women involved in ‘Lullabies Our Mothers Sang’ know well in advance of us visiting exactly what they want to express on film. When we arrive at Nyankir’s house one morning, she greets us warmly and in the first few minutes sits down, offers praise to God, then sings—filling the room with a hypnotically beautiful song about the ugliness of war. She has already made lunch and later her sister Adit and cousin Tabisa arrive with Tabisa’s children and everyone eats, sings and reminisces in both Dinka and English.
The women’s relationships with one another pre-date the ‘Lullabies’; they share family and/or history and all have a relationship with Chrisoula Kanaris, who is a font of practical and creative settlement support. Parenthood—how to navigate one’s role as both a daughter and a mother within Sudanese and Australian contexts—is of huge importance among these women. And working collaboratively with them leads me to reflect on my own familial legacies. Tabisa, a mother of three, sings a choir song when we visit, a song about asking God for help with all we do in life, and in the same breath she thanks God and Chrisoula for driving lessons.

I know one of the women, Ajok, through Coffee Means Deep Conversation and we greet each other warmly, yet even those we have not met before treat me, Grace McKenzie (photographer) and Biddy Connor (composer) with incredible generosity and trust. Connected via Chrisoula, we are almost extended family.

The larger point of ‘In My Shoes’ was a yearning for acknowledgement and relationship to a world outside of Braybrook. For the two oldest participants, Mazna and Manyok, this yearning manifested in change they instigated in their own lives. Mazna, who never missed one session of the project, received a scholarship to study Health Promotion and found a job as a youth researcher. She continued pursuing creative opportunities and obtained funding in 2007 from Western Edge Youth Arts to hire me as a mentor for a performance piece she presented at the Big West Festival. This year, she has joined a playback theatre group, which invites the audience to tell stories from their lives for the actors to perform. On stage, Mazna shines. Her work is lucid, empathic and compelling.
Manyok and I made a documentary entitled Half Court, investigating the lack of free basketball facilities in Braybrook. Determined yet polite, Manyok interviewed those he believed to have the power: city councillors. He skirted around what he really wanted to ask: ‘Do you have a problem with groups of Sudanese and Somali boys hanging out? Why are there more recreational facilities in suburbs where white people live?’. However, Manyok’s unspoken questions were implicit and Half Court caused a small furore, galvanising the Braybrook and Maidstone Neighbourhood Association into petitioning the City of Maribyrnong for a free basketball court, which three years later is finally being built.

Manyok was awarded a basketball scholarship and now plays professionally in America. His dilemma when I last saw him was whether or not he should play for an Italian team. It sounded incredibly glamorous and a far remove from a year of making digital video shorts. Yet I am certain that ‘In My Shoes’ gave Manyok a sense of focus and offered a type of love. For the year he engaged with the project artists, he knew we held him in mind and believed in what he wanted to express to the world.

No one yet knows what the outcome(s) of ‘Lullabies’ will be and how each person’s story will be linked; there are so many different possibilities. Ajok was separated from her mother at four years old and her house is a shelter for many women in her community. Yar’s mother died young and she was partly brought up by Nyibol who was a nurse in Sudan and now sings in a choir of ex-nurses taught by Nyankir, who brought up her sister Adit who came to Melbourne and sponsored Nyankir—and so on.

Each time I see Nyankir she takes both my hands and tells me I could be her daughter. She isn’t significantly older than me; yet it doesn’t seem strange, such is her aura of calm and the warmth and understanding in her face.

Anghere, who is both a translator and storyteller in her own right, is interested in the contradictions inherent in what has been gathered so far and issues of respect and gender. Her husband, James, describes how men cross the road for married women in Sudan to give them space. Here they do not but, he comments wryly, they are becoming better at cooking. Bronica appeals to the Australian Government to let Sudanese families physically discipline women and children. Rose talks of how she is bringing up her two sons to treat women as their equals.

Yar has footage from Sudan, which she lends me for use in her story. I know nothing of the context but enjoy the dancing and drumming, people getting in and out of trucks, deserted roads, deep gold and green countryside. The camera is handheld and much of the footage is over-exposed. I find it is washed out and choppy, exactly like a dream or a flash of memory, and I immediately feel that it perfectly complements the footage we have of women recalling life in Sudan from their Australian living rooms. Anghere and I agree that it could make a compelling beginning to the film.

A significant part of ‘In My Shoes’ was about creating an environment with and for the young people who were making the films—one of imaginative play, connection and safety; an environment that they could reproduce in other areas of their lives. ‘Lullabies’ is much more about the women inviting us into their environment. This is a gift from adults who have experienced full lives of upheaval, grief and joy elsewhere and who intensely want Australia to recognise who they are.

‘Lullabies Our Mothers Sang’ is auspiced by the New Hope Foundation and funded by Arts Victoria, the JB Seed, the Royal Historical Society Folkloric Fund and the Moonee Valley City Council.

Reference
Anchoring through the arts

Horn of Africa Arts Partnership Program

Sue Clark, Head of the Centre for Cultural Partnerships, Victorian College of the Arts

‘The arts are a way that people can find a way in Australia. We have been in a stormy sea, but there is an anchor and that anchor is art.’ Young Horn of Africa participant

The Centre for Cultural Partnerships, Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), University of Melbourne, was launched in December 2008. The Centre is an interdisciplinary hub, bringing together the resources and expertise of community cultural development practitioners, partnership brokers, social entrepreneurs, arts educators, social/urban planners and public policy analysts to provide practice-based teaching, action research and knowledge exchange. It has a focus on the role of the arts in strengthening communities, promoting social inclusion and empowering cultural renewal.

The Horn of Africa Arts Partnership Program (2007–2008), with projects in theatre, filmmaking and digital media, is an initiative of the Centre for Cultural Partnerships and the Horn of Africa Communities Network. The program aims to provide a ‘creative space’ in which artists and young people can explore issues of identity, culture and settlement. The overall plan involves a number of complementary processes:

• active creative participation as both an artistic and community capacity-building process
• individual and collective arts skills development through the involvement of professional artists and teachers addressing artistic expressions in theatre, music, film and digital media, woven together through the art of storytelling
• mentoring processes to assist personal and community leadership developments
• elders’ involvement as cultural custodians, interpreters and inspirational leaders.

Participants take part in a dance workshop (photograph by Jill Parris).
Context

Refugee youth
In the past decade, 65 per cent of people who arrived in Australia under the government’s humanitarian program were under the age of 30. In 2006, this figure was 75 per cent. Without access to supportive processes and services, these young people run the risk of experiencing ongoing obstacles—social exclusion, disconnection, inability to gain employment and poor performance at school following often interrupted or intermittent schooling in their home country or in refugee camps—leading to further entrenched problems. They are often torn between two cultures. One of the recommendations of the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues report into refugee youth resettlement (Oliff and Mohammed, 2007) was for ‘support for refugee youth leadership and youth-led initiatives in the provision of holistic support for young people’.

Community cultural development
The Horn of Africa Arts Partnership Program is framed as a community cultural development model. With collaborations between artists and communities, this form of community-based arts practice has been demonstrated to be a highly effective way of engaging communities in a process of participation, transformation and self-determination (Victorian College of the Arts, 2009). In developing the program, each of the partners committed to a long-term investment. They also agreed to an empowerment framework with a set of agreed guiding principles and protocols that included respect, openness, acknowledging the diversity of cultures, and a commitment to cultural exchange, to the discipline of arts practice and to artistic determination.

A creative learning environment
The arts provided a creative environment for youth arts leadership work as developmental learning. Arts workshops provided a space to release imagination, explore and develop the art of storytelling. Across the Horn of Africa, community storytelling is central in deepening meaning and celebrating and articulating cultural traditions, community values and aspirations.

The significance of the remaking and sharing of ‘story’ within a safe and meaningful environment is also increasingly recognised within the fields of community development. Skilfully applied, ‘story’ can be a powerful tool in aiding recovery from the dislocation and fragmentation experienced by many refugees.

In the report ‘The Creative Age: knowledge and skills for the new economy’, Seltzer and Bentley (1999) argued that the central challenge for the education sector is to find ways of embedding learning in a range of meaningful contexts, where students can use their skills and knowledge creatively to make an impact on the world around them. They proposed a shift in education away from what people should know to what they should be able to do with their knowledge. In doing so, they argued for a focus on fostering creativity.

Seltzer and Bentley identified a number of characteristics of learning environments that encourage creativity. These are:

- **Trust**: secure, trusting relationships are essential to environments in which people are prepared to take risks and are able to learn from failure
Freedom of action: the creative application of knowledge is only possible where people are able to make real choices over what they do and how they try to do it.

Variation of contexts: learners need experience in applying their skills in a range of contexts in order to make connections between them.

The right balance between skills and challenge: creativity emerges in environments where people are engaged in challenging activities and have the right level of skill to meet them.

Interactive exchange of knowledge and ideas: creativity is fostered in environments where ideas, feedback and evaluation are constantly exchanged, and where learners can draw on diverse sources of information and expertise.

Real world outcomes: creative ability and motivation are reinforced by the experience of making an impact—achieving concrete outcomes, changing the way that things are done (Seltzer and Bentley, 1999: ix).

In developing the project, partners were committed to providing an environment with these characteristics, which would encourage the young people to test themselves against a creative learning framework.

Key findings

Transformative learning—Arts workshops facilitated participatory, reciprocal and transformative learning that empowered self-responsibility. These learning experiences occurred when deep, emotional intensity activated meaningful reflection, new thinking and applied future learning.

Professional arts training—A valuable aspect has been the involvement of experienced professional artists. As role models for the young people, they provided a disciplined professional learning experience for skills development, creative production and public presentation.

Holistic approach—Using the arts to contribute to resettlement through capacity building and leadership development has meant that each participant has gained confidence to find their own unique capacities for living, learning and leading.

Connected to community—The involvement of the Horn of Africa elders has been a critical intergenerational component to building meaningful and enriching relationships. Young people are seen by elders as representatives of their community and as having significant responsibilities to their community.
A collective ethos—Learning to work together as part of a team has been a key outcome. Young participants commented that success depended on the effort and commitment of each individual—‘Helping is the best way of putting something together, and we can learn from each other’.

Sense of ownership and responsibility—According to a participant, the creative work ‘gave us an opportunity to have a voice—helped us to know where we stand’.

Empathetic intelligence—The arts activated empathetic engagement, creating a dynamic between thinking and feeling, often through non-verbal symbols that transcended spoken language. Through workshop processes, such as improvisation, mime, roleplay and visual storyboarding, young people explored, tested and redeveloped their individual capabilities.

Young Horn of Africa participant: This story has a large message. It is all about war. If there wasn’t a war it would have been easy and we would have all been living together. But this story is not just for Africans. There are all different people coming from here and there and everywhere and the war affects them and this is why I am very happy because this is not just a story for us, it is a story for all those who have been suffering out there.

Understanding the role and power of the arts—Young people have come to understand the power of the arts to present challenging issues, raise questions, deepen cultural meaning and be a ‘voice’ for change.

Personal development and leadership—A number of the young people spoke about the universality of their stories and stressed the importance of being acknowledged, presenting to an audience and making connections to other people with similar experiences.

Young Horn of Africa participant: You can easily see how much we have changed and how much we now think ahead. This is the proper quality of leader. We have evolved and matured so much … we can see that those qualities of leadership are coming out and being explored.

Summary of outcomes

The participants and those working with them identified the following key outcomes:

• improved capacity to articulate what they need and where they want to be
• growing sense of pride in their achievements and self-confidence in their abilities
• a new sense of empathetic intelligence, self-esteem and self-responsibility
• acknowledging their experience as having ‘universal’ relevance
• understanding the value of social discourse and how to respect alternative realities
• a deeper understanding of intercultural similarities and differences
• new language, literacy and cognitive skills
• new performance and creative presentation skills
• pathways to work opportunities and to other artistic developments.

Burhan Nur Horn, African Elder and Executive Committee member of the Horn of Africa Community Network said, ‘The creativity and educational purpose of the African Arts project has assisted young people to voice their ideas and aspirations … Art can not only inspire, but also heal and nurture the inner self’.
Conclusion

The Horn of Africa Arts Partnership Program has been an important step towards developing a new model of collaborative arts partnership that fosters community cultural leadership. In reflecting on the project’s achievements to date, Sue Clark, as Program Leader, identified a number of outcomes for over 30 young Horn of Africa participants and many other community elders and leaders:

- 16 young people have returned to school and/or study
- four young people have applied for leadership positions
- 10 young people have written scripts and produced theatre and digital films
- eight young people are creating digital stories as web-films
- six young women are committed to advancing their dance skills
- eight young people are developing their acting skills
- eight young people are learning theatre production skills
- six male elders and two young people worked together to create three short films
- two young leaders will join the project as paid liaison workers.

The program’s future direction is multi-layered with aims to establish:

- **Youth Arts Leadership Course**, an arts industry development for employment and training
- **‘Theatre for Change’**, an intercultural exchange, encompassing workshops and participatory performances directed towards social change, working in schools and refugee communities in Dandenong, Brimbank and Warrnambool
- **Digital Media Learning Lab** for emerging young filmmakers
- **Business development model** for a Horn of Africa digital media collective
- **Documentation and evaluation**, such as the project evaluation report published online in April 2009 on the Centre for Cultural Partnerships website at <www.vca.unimelb.edu.au/ccpccd/>.

This article was written by Sue Clark, Head of the Centre for Cultural Partnerships, Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne, on behalf of the Horn of Africa Arts Partnership Program Team, Melika Yassin Sheikh-Eldin and Burhan Nur (Horn of Africa Communities Network), and Centre staff Shahin Shafaei (artist/creative producer) and Jane Gilmour (research/documentation).

References


West Papuan exhibition

Facilitating art classes for the West Papuan community

Steph Woollard, International Development student

Facilitating art classes with the West Papuans in 2008 was a great success. I have known the West Papuan refugee community since their arrival in Australia, and I was very happy to be given the opportunity by the Ecumenical Migration Centre to teach art as a weekly Saturday activity. I wanted to create a comfortable and fun space for any members of the community to come and join in, especially those people who were the more inactive or quiet members of the community.

We began by painting landscapes. Each person chose a photo from a pile and, after some apprehension and help to get started, they began. The first canvases were just to get a feel for the medium, using trial and error as they learned.

The canvases all turned out brilliantly for first-time painters. Every painting was unique and had its own style. Different personalities shone through in the teamwork that was needed to help set up, clean up, share the paints and brushes, and wait until I was finished helping others with their paintings.

After the initial painting of a copied landscape, I encouraged everyone to paint from their heads and minds or, if they preferred, find a picture that displayed their culture or something back home. This is when the art really began. Toward the conclusion of the project, the canvases were phenomenal. I began to see the painters’ hearts on the canvases. By this stage of the art classes, they were comfortable with me and each other and it was about painting what was in their hearts and minds. They painted with confidence and certainty. The sense of pride and self-fulfilment on completion of these works was priceless.

The art class was a space of time every Saturday where the community could come together and laugh, play and talk while listening to traditional West Papuan music. The ages of the participants ranged from seven to 50 years old. It was a great activity to unite the group.

To me, the success of the program was displayed by the full room of West Papuans every week. But the true indicator of the program being of great benefit was seeing some of the quieter, less confident Papuans—for example, those with a lower level of English—turn up every week without fail.

Learning English has been harder for some than others, so some find it hard to express themselves and, therefore, integrate into the wider community. The effect of this on their confidence and self-esteem is clear. Anyone and everyone can express themselves on canvas. For some, this was the first time they had expressed themselves fully since arriving in Australia in 2006. Verbally expressing their ongoing hurt and pain is difficult for some. Being able to express themselves in other forms such as art, I believe, relieves tension.

At the conclusion of classes, we had a very successful exhibition where the public and friends came to view the paintings. There was also a film taken of the West Papuans throughout the various art workshops, which included interviews with a number of the participants who told the story behind their paintings. I look forward to running more art classes to facilitate further self-development and self-expression within the West Papuan community.

The West Papuan art classes at the Ecumenical Migration Centre were made possible by the Rotary Club of Melbourne.
Kankelay, which means ‘unity’ in Krio, has been delighting audiences in Melbourne since 2007 when a group of Sierra Leonean women first came together to sing and dance their traditional cultural repertoire. What is so interesting about the performing group, besides their vibrant performances in traditional African attire, is the dynamic nature of their songs. Made in traditional form, the songs reflect the circumstances of the moment, the war at home, the strangeness of Australian life, what they have lost and what they bring to their new lives here. Kankelay is a group that tells us much about the power of song!

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, in partnership with The Boite (a not-for-profit organisation that has brought world music to Melbourne since 1979), has been working with Sierra Leonean women to reclaim their musical traditions here in Australia and to share their music and dance with the wider Australian community through performance. Funding for this project has been provided by VicHealth, under their Community Participation Scheme.

Research identifies the positive health impacts of music, particularly singing (Stacy et al., 2002). Participation in choirs enhances these benefits, as people build relationships and work together as a group to achieve something. Many refugees’ home communities are communal and the process of being forced to flee undermines their communities.
Through their participation in Kankelay, the women are identifying the important roles of music, dance and group performance in reconnecting with their traditions and identity. The singing group plays a particular role in community building within the larger group. The women are from diverse cultural and language groups within Sierra Leone. In order to share a repertoire to perform, the women have to teach each other their particular songs, the languages they are in and their meanings! This is a strengthening and confirming process within the group.

For these women, singing and dancing is a joyful confirmation of identity and culture, having fled violence and human rights violations, spent years in refugee camps and resettled half-way around the world. Working together as a performance group, the women participate in healing processes, sharing and reminiscing as they build a repertoire. This culminates in performances that share their cultural heritage with the wider Australian community, contributing to a sense of inclusion and validation.

Kankelay has performed in a range of venues, such as Government House, along the streets of Fitzroy, The Boite World Music Café and at the VicHealth-sponsored World Conference From Margins to Mainstream. Their music and cultural traditions have been heard by varied audiences, and their skills are acknowledged through paid performances. They are making a significant contribution to the larger musical and cultural life of Melbourne.

Kankelay brings to Melbourne songs, dance and cultural context never before performed here. And the women are contributing new songs they are composing—songs that deal with their refugee and resettlement experiences. No doubt, in time, their music will start to have an impact on other musicians and artists, as well as the audiences who appreciate what they are hearing.

Reference

Ezeldin Deng is a participant in the Horn of Africa Arts Partnership Program at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). Originally from Sudan, Ezeldin arrived in Australia in 2004. He is now an actor, filmmaker and musician.

Ezeldin came to Australia in January 2004 as a refugee with his brother, sister, grandmother and mother. Before arriving in Australia, Ezeldin was not actively involved in the arts, although music and drama were present in his daily life.

**Ezeldin:** It’s very common over there [Sudan] but when I was young, I wasn’t interested in art, in acting or anything like that. I just see people dancing, singing, some drama, some drawing but I never had no interest in it. When I went to Egypt, I found there’s a lot of people getting involved in drama. I always watched people but I never got on the stage there. But it’s really common and people enjoy it. Arts—back home, it means culture and happiness and forgetting about the pain and just looking out for the future.

In Melbourne, Ezeldin began acting for local Sudanese and African communities, taking part in celebrations and performing in schools.

**Ezeldin:** I started in 2004 when I came down here [Melbourne], I started to do acting just to improve my English, not to put myself into it, but I found myself just doing it, and people liked what I do.
In 2006, the VCA began to collaborate with the Horn of Africa Communities Network, offering creative workshops to young refugees from Horn of Africa countries. Over the past four years, more than 50 young people have participated in the project. Elders from the Horn of Africa communities suggested that Ezeldin become involved.

**Ezeldin:** When we started [at VCA], I didn’t know which way it’s going to lead me or which way it’s going to lead the others. When I did it and I put my commitment into it, it did take me to the next level ... I made a lot of connections with people: artists, directors, writers. I even got a chance to go and do a course in the film and TV school.

Through the VCA workshops, Ezeldin has developed new skills and is acting on his ambition of becoming a cinematographer. He created and directed the 16-minute short film *Broken Dreams*, about two young African men who become involved in American hip hop to the disapproval of their community. It screened as part of Multicultural Arts Victoria’s Stories of an African Australia Short Film Screenings at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in 2008. He has also created the web-film *Dogme*.

**Ezeldin:** When I was young I said ‘I want to be a cinematographer’. I used to play around with fake cameras and sometimes just play with my hands. Where did I learn? I’ve just been taking borrowed cameras and just done films around the city, somewhere, anywhere. I’ve got a lot of tapes, I can tell you.

Ezeldin recently performed as part of the African hip hop band Nubian Knights at the post-bushfire Yea Autumn Festival in country Victoria. The performance was a success. Reactions in the Sudanese and Horn of Africa communities to Ezeldin’s films, acting and music have also been overwhelmingly positive.

**Ezeldin:** They go crazy. They all want to get involved. I’ve been giving a lot of inspiration to the young, old, women, men, to everybody, you know. Not just from my community but from the whole African community ... just put your heart into it and do what you do and don’t even try to look back.

One of the aims of the Horn of Africa Arts Partnership Program is to support participants in building a bridge between their cultures of origin and the wider Australian community (Victorian College of the Arts, 2009). Ezeldin believes that a bridge is beginning to take shape.

**Ezeldin:** You can’t build a bridge straightaway ... We’re building it really slowly to be like the West Gate, bit by bit, so people can go this side and people can go that side ... We need to make it strong.

Ezeldin now works as a paid liaison worker for the Horn of Africa Arts Partnership Program at the VCA. He continues to be involved with the creative workshops and is planning to shoot a feature-length film next year.

**Ezeldin:** It’s a lot of hard work but it’s worth it when you try. Even if you take one step, it’s worth it, you know?

Reference
I love working with groups and have learned to be confident in myself and the ‘group’ to do the work necessary to create trust and growth. With this belief in myself and the process, I ventured off into the world of resettlement where I was to work particularly with people who had recently arrived from Africa.

In one group, my brief was to work with mothers to build their capacity as parents in Australia and to address family and relationship issues in the Australian context. In another, I was to help create a trusting environment in which young people could express themselves openly, learn new skills and build their resilience.

‘Sweet and Sour Settlement’

The project work with the young people, most of whom had come from Sudan within the past two to three years, was wonderful, playful, engaging and energising. The program consisted of an introduction to a variety of arts activities and a time for reflection and sharing. The participants gave their all to whatever artistic activity they were introduced to. Dancing, drumming, acting, theatre games and diction all generated laughter and full participation, and the reflection and sharing built in intensity as the weeks progressed.

Over time, the young people shared many experiences and as they did so, I became aware of how trapped they felt. Over and over again, they described situations in which they felt like helpless victims of a system that did not support their settlement and integration into Australian life. I became so concerned about what I was hearing that I began to wonder what needed to change.

As I wrestled with what I was seeing and hearing, I began to conceive of a way to bring together all the data I was gathering so that I could use it to inform both myself and others.

I hoped that by creating a space in which we could begin to experience what was being presented to us and wrestle with it, we would deepen our understanding of the processes that lead to people’s feelings of helplessness. I believed that if we could gain some understanding of this process, we might find a way forward that would foster growth and resilience, rather than entrench dependence for people who would not have made it to Australia if they were not strong to begin with.

With this in mind, I have created a board game that includes a fictitious scenario for many issues, which I have named on the board. It is my hope that as people play ‘Sweet and Sour Settlement’ and imagine themselves in the position of new settlers, they will see these lives from a new perspective. It is my dream that this may lead to new ways of supporting recent arrivals so that they can retain and build on the strength they already have.
I have shown the 'Sweet and Sour Settlement' board to several young migrants and they say that it encapsulates the important factors dominating their lives. They are excited that some people may attempt to see Australia through their eyes and shape their interactions with new migrants differently.

People can use the experience of playing 'Sweet and Sour Settlement' to talk about and rethink how, when and where we welcome our new arrivals to join us in our new lives together.

'High-rise'

Now, back to my work with women who have been in Australia for a longer time than the young people who inspired my first game.

I began work with a group of Somali women with the brief of teaching them parenting skills in Australia. The first week was okay. The second week was slightly better. By week three, I felt like a complete fraud as I wrestled with what to teach mothers who seemed to have endless patience with their children and a tolerance for this white woman who had less experience with parenting than they did. After all, many of them had supported their children in the very difficult circumstances of war and famine before coming to Australia.

By week five, numbers had dwindled and I decided that what I was doing was not working. I asked the women what they would like to do. They said that they were interested in sewing. They would like to make a quilt. As it happened, I had the makings of a quilt at home. I had begun it a couple of years previously and not got much further than cutting the material to size. I brought in my material, scissors and needles and we began to sew.
As we sat together on the floor, we talked about the children’s health, the latest courses at the neighbourhood house and the ups and downs of family life. We needed to ensure the safety of the youngsters who played around us as we stitched together. As people needed, they would move on or take a week off to attend to other things. The nature of the group became informal. As people got to know me better, they would approach me before or after the group to seek individual advice or support. The work of parenting training was happening while we distracted ourselves with what colours went together best and how to stitch our quilt together. Once the quilt was complete, we began to think about what we would do next.

The women wanted to talk about their lives on the high-rise estate and we decided we would combine this with some artwork and put it together in a booklet that could be used to inform local agencies of issues of concern to participants. Once we had done this, people were keen to try other crafts. We tried making potato cuts but this ended with everyone covered in paint and little to show for our efforts. We decided to move on again.

As the group proceeded, more and more time was focused on the difficulties people faced in high-rise living. People asked for advice on moving out of the flats and we approached the Victorian Office of Housing to come and talk to us about a house-building scheme. While this grabbed people’s initial interest, we later found that unless at least one person in a household was working, there would be no way to guarantee ongoing payments—for example, if you were a single mother on benefits. While most women were preparing to move towards part-time work, they had no prospect of earning enough to support themselves on this scheme. At present, waiting lists are not moving because of a severe housing shortage and people were becoming angry. I suggested we might harness this anger to find a way of letting others know just how unbearable high-rise living is for them. We would develop a game that people could play that demonstrates what it is like to be a Somali living on a high-rise estate.

We began by creating five fictitious characters. As we talked about each character, I continually pointed out that these characters were not to be based on specific people. As we worked on the characters, the group sprang to life in a way that had not occurred before. The women who had never wanted to talk about their own past lives began to talk vociferously about what had happened in Somalia prior to their leaving. People who worked close by to the room in which we would meet began to come in for a few minutes at a time as they ducked out of work and they added their bit. The group took on the feeling of a marketplace as people came and went and spoke very excitedly about their past lives. The work of uncovering their history and past trauma was happening before my eyes and the women were loving the sessions.
We spent a full three months developing all the aspects of ‘High-rise’, with a comprehensive set of cards covering:

- how people conducted their daily lives on the estate, including some of the food they prepare and eat, their religion and their day-to-day activities
- the problems of living on the estate
- people’s dreams of change.

We talked about what influenced their lives the most and decided that the biggest issue was how long people had to wait to get off the estate. We decided that time on the housing waiting list would become the currency for ‘High-rise’. Day-to-day expenses were also a big issue; these expenses were documented on the board.

The women involved in developing this game are very proud of their work and are hoping that it will challenge people to understand their issues and support their striving for change.

Playing ‘High-rise’ gives people the opportunity to talk and think about what it is like to live on one of Australia’s high-rise estates. It is my hope that people will take time to put themselves in the shoes of the people who have inspired this game and that this will lead to new ideas about how to tackle the immense difficulties faced by those who live the lives depicted in ‘High-rise’.

![The playing board for ‘High-rise’](image)
The third space

In both the games described in this article, I have drawn on my understanding of the ‘third space’. This third space allows for belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image (Boal, 2002). If this process is successfully negotiated, a kind of ‘container’ is formed where contradictory material can be held without an insistence ‘upon its resolution’.

This space:

• allows people to explore their own issues at a distance
• allows for open discussion of what that other person did ‘wrong’
• opens up discussions of how that third person can tackle their issues.

Lumsden (1999) says that this ‘third space’ or ‘transitional zone’ allows for healing, learning and creativity, where new ideas can emerge, emotions can be expressed and new relationships tried out.

The development of both games grew out of creating such a ‘transitional zone’ in both groups. I am hoping that those who play the games will enter a ‘third space’ where they will be able to suspend judgement and explore the possibilities of new solutions.

If you wish to find out more about either of these board games, please contact Jill Parris at the Ecumenical Migration Centre, Brotherhood of St Laurence.

References


The Torch Project

Creating arts-based change
Kelly Thorburn, Media and Communications Coordinator, The Torch Project

The Torch Project facilitates diverse, vibrant arts and community projects throughout Victoria, bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together in collaborative arts events and workshops to address critical social issues. The company’s work is widely recognised by the arts, community and health sectors as being an effective tool in promoting community wellbeing through the arts, with its work and methodology featured in publications and videos produced by VicHealth, the Australia Council for the Arts, the Centre for Popular Education, the Department for Victorian Communities and others. Having evolved from a core of theatre professionals and aspiring artists in 1999, The Torch Project is now a not-for-profit company with a close partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

Central to the company’s work is its commitment to high artistic quality, employing narrative-driven, image-based theatre, quality music, digital film, photography and other art forms. Emerging local artists, identified by their communities, work alongside professional artists from The Torch Project and health and community personnel, enabling exploration and development of the local artists’ creative talents while nurturing their leadership skills and working towards building the arts and cultural capacity of the community as a whole. The Torch Project has gained critical acclaim for its willingness to present community-based, socially critical art using its unique community cultural development (CCD) model, Re-Igniting Community (RIC).

Young Indigenous performers in *The Seeming*, Bendigo 2005 (photograph by Rusty Stewart)
Re-Igniting Community

Re-Igniting Community is an arts and culture driven community cultural development model that allows Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, including newly arrived and refugee communities, to come together and share stories and experiences around the themes of history, culture, identity and belonging in an open and welcoming space. With the help of respected professional artists from The Torch Project, community members then combine their skills to create high-quality art that reflects their shared story. Cultural diversity is celebrated and community members collaborate to create a representation of their unique community culture. Projects have tackled difficult issues surrounding multiculturalism, racism, domestic violence, substance abuse, youth poverty and community dysfunction, paving the way for ongoing community action around these subjects. Community needs relating to the issues are addressed through a process of community consultation, theatrical and artistic workshops, public presentations and ongoing community development activities guided by local communities. The RIC model provides ideal conditions for fostering meaningful, long-term relationships with individuals and organisations in communities, while developing formal and informal partnerships at local and state levels.

Objectives of Re-Igniting Community

The RIC model works to showcase Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture as a means of enhancing community vibrancy, while encouraging communities to create great art that facilitates community change by sharing their stories, hopes and aspirations.

RIC aims to build sustainable partnerships with governments, organisations and individuals to support the arts as an effective mechanism for change. It encourages the independence of ongoing RIC projects by building community cultural and artistic capacity.

The model works to enhance the skills of emerging and professional artists to work within a RIC framework, while increasing opportunities for these artists to be engaged in initiatives that strengthen community health and wellbeing.

RIC aims to contribute to a CCD evidence base that advocates for the arts to be recognised and resourced as an effective community-strengthening tool.
Re-Igniting Community engagement process

Partnerships and mutually respectful relationships created via RIC engagements can take up to two to three years to establish. This time helps to build a cultural awareness between individuals and organisations, encourages community ownership and allows for development of partnerships with governmental departments while nurturing the passion to improve things for the future.

Through the process of conducting RIC projects over the last 10 years, The Torch Project has developed and refined the model to include minor, major and mentor projects. A more recent addition to the process is provision of ongoing support to partner communities via a formal Re-Igniting Community Victoria (RICVIC) network at the completion of mentor projects.

Re-Igniting Community Victoria

The Re-Igniting Community Victoria project was established in 2006 following consultation with communities. Discussions revealed that a lack of skills and leadership capacity was preventing communities from successfully running their own independent community-initiated RIC ventures. The Advisory Group that was formed continues to make recommendations to The Torch Project, while the community has its say via a state-wide Steering Committee. As a result of these findings, the RICVIC project now provides communities with training and skills development relating to the RIC model, mentoring for emerging leaders in communities and networking across Victoria to share ideas and support each other around future RIC projects.

The Torch Project has worked in partnership with metropolitan and regional communities across Victoria, including Bendigo, Doveton, East Gippsland, Geelong, Kerang, Melbourne CBD, Mildura, Frankston / Mornington Peninsula, Robinvale, Seymour, Shepparton, South West, Swan Hill and the western suburbs of Melbourne. Nine RICVIC mentor projects have been successfully completed since 2007, including:

- **Swan Hill (2008)**—Lore vs. Law is a 14-minute digital film highlighting the benefits of pre-planning for funerals and writing a legally binding will. It was created in direct response to the local Indigenous community’s desire for an educational tool that would be a catalyst for discussion around wills and their role in avoiding family feuds over the belongings of deceased relatives. The film continues to be used as an educational resource for Indigenous communities with screenings at Indigenous Health Services around Victoria.

- **East Gippsland (2008)**—’Lakes Mischief: From Timber to Town’ involved young participants from the Lakes Entrance Secondary College’s SEEK program for disengaged youth, who worked with a team of professional and local hip hop recording artists to create an original and unique hip hop music CD. While giving the young Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants a chance to explore issues that concern them through their chosen medium of hip hop, the project also addressed key learning outcomes of their educational program in the areas of literacy and personal development.

- **Kerang (2008)**—Jacky Jack is a digital storytelling project about one man’s quest to win the local bowls tournament, at the cost of relationships with his family and Indigenous culture. The ‘mockumentary’ style film deals with community issues such as family violence, cultural connection and pride, family resilience and cross-cultural relationships. These themes are incorporated into the script using elements of satire, irony and humour, creating a powerful tool for generating community discussion.
RICignition: Creating arts-based change

The Torch Project has conducted the four-day RICignition gathering, where delegates from previously engaged communities learned more about using the arts to generate positive community change via the RIC model. Training provided at RICignition reinforced skills learned through previous RICVIC participation, while providing access to the formal qualifications required to drive RIC projects independently of The Torch Project. RICignition was held over the ANZAC Day weekend, 24–27 April 2009, in Seymour, Victoria.

The new Certificate IV in Community Cultural Development (Re-Igniting Community) forms the framework for RICignition, with delegates learning through dynamic hands-on training and practical examples. Sessions focused on engaging community members, developing CCD skills, building individual and community capacity, sourcing funding and sponsorship, and developing and implementing projects in community. The Torch Project primarily facilitated these workshops, with the support of experienced CCD workers, social change experts and professional artists. Partnership arrangements are also being discussed with the Brotherhood of St Laurence to allow formal delivery of this training package using their Registered Training Organisation status after RICignition.

Small seeding grants used toward funding of community-initiated projects after RICignition will give delegates the opportunity to put their knowledge and skills into practice. During this stage, The Torch Project will continue to provide limited project and artistic support in a more backseat role that empowers delegates to take the lead in their communities. These seeding grant projects will formalise the delegates’ commitment to being ‘Torch Bearers’ in their community, with the responsibility of driving local RIC projects, advocating for social change and highlighting the importance of cultural and artistic activity. Successful completion of these projects will form a major part of the certificate assessment.

Beyond 2009

With the completion of the RICVIC project at the end of 2009, the company will return to its core business of delivering major RIC projects with new communities around Victoria. The Torch Project will continue to provide ongoing support to its current 14 partner communities while it further develops the RICVIC network and its strategies into a capacity-building branch of the company during 2009–2012.

The Torch Project is currently supported by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, VicHealth, the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, the Department of Health and Ageing, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Helen Macpherson Smith Trust and private donors.
Shahin Shafaei is a writer, actor and director who has recently completed a Masters in Community Cultural Development. He works with Brimbank Council and the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) on community-based arts projects.

Shahin: I started writing in Iran at the age of 18. I was a young man, who was quite lost between religion and the reality of culture ... Questioning the difference between the religious costumes in the society and the history of Persian culture, I was basically talking about the struggle that the younger generation had in that society ... In a way I was political and also, in a way, community-minded, because there was a group of us who would be represented by that story.

Shahin fled Iran in 2000 due to persecution for his writing. Travelling from Indonesia to Australia with people smugglers, his boat was intercepted and Shahin spent 20 months in Curtin Detention Centre, Western Australia. After his release on a temporary protection visa, Shahin continued writing and acting and became increasingly involved in community cultural development.

Adams and Goldbard (2002: 8) define community cultural development as 'the work of artist-organizers (“community artists”) who collaborate with others to express identity, concerns and aspirations through the arts and communications media, while building cultural capacity and contributing to social change'. As artist in residence at Brimbank Council, Shahin is working towards writing a play about community wellbeing. He organises forum theatres in Brimbank communities, in which the experiences of the participants/actors are used to create short plays.
based on ‘wellbeing’. During a forum theatre performance, audience members (spect-actors) may stop, intervene and change the action of the play, in order to take characters in more positive directions. These kinds of community collaborations have changed Shahin’s approach to writing.

Shahin: I can’t write about people anymore; I write with people. It’s a different kind of approach: it’s not up-down, it’s down-up. I work in the field with people knowing that this is the knowledge, people have the knowledge; this room that I’m sitting in with people, this is the source of the knowledge. And I can put them together and technically create a play or a film or something. That has made the basis of my practice in community cultural development.

Many of Shahin’s other projects as an artist-organiser involve engaging refugee communities with creative storytelling processes, such as digital storytelling, writing, drama and music workshops with the VCA’s Horn of Africa Arts Partnership Program.

Shahin: If I want to bring one specific [theme] that everybody relates to, it would be perhaps the theme of ‘belonging’. No matter if you have lived in Australia for 200 years or if you have just arrived off the plane, all of us are longing for belonging. We are looking for ways to belong. Part of that belonging, of course, is all different layers of receiving acknowledgement.

Arts initiatives are increasingly used as a way of facilitating social inclusion of refugee and recent migrant communities. There are many measures of success of these initiatives, including increased employment rates and improved educational performance. One of the greatest successes for Shahin is creating a safe place for participants to express themselves.

Shahin: A safe space means that they feel free to share stuff with each other, they feel free to fail, there’s no right or wrong, people can express themselves and people can really have other people’s attention ... they can have eye contact with each other, they can touch each other without being judged ... Creating that space and holding it is a very important aspect [of my work].

Empowerment and healing may be part of the creative process, but the public display of the work or the declaration of the work is also important.

Shahin: I am a true believer of the audience as the completion of the creation. This is a loop of information that you create—either you tell a story or [create] a painting or poetry—each one of the audience will take their own perceptions of it and they complete it, complete that loop the way they see it ... One of the aspects of belonging is the dialogue with others. If a theatre piece can create that dialogue, then the loop of information is going to live beyond the story that you told on stage.

Shahin stresses that the artist-organiser is not a therapist, although, in his own experience, he found the process of sharing and talking about his story and creating the play Refugitive (2003), based on his story, to be therapeutic and transformative.

Shahin: By sharing my story, I feel like I have reclaimed [my] new identity. I was able to stand up and say that ‘this is who I am’ ... I was bestowed an identity as a refugee. There is a stereotypical idea about refugees and there are some personal ideas behind it, for each one of us. As Shahin Shafaei, by sharing my story, I declare that this is the way I fulfil the identity of a refugee, as an Iranian boat person who came to Australia through seeking asylum and who stayed in a detention centre. I claimed it. I owned that identity. That has really helped me transform in a way ... I see myself part of this picture, this new picture ... Whether [people] hate me or they like me, they have acknowledged me.

Reference

Nikki Marshall currently coordinates projects at Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre. Nikki has worked with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities for the past 20 years, including five years at the Ecumenical Migration Centre from 1989 to 1994.

From 2004 to 2006 I was privileged to coordinate Between Memory and Hope ...Tears for the Future, an Iraqi women’s storytelling and quilt art project, jointly auspiced by Mercy Hospital for Women and Northern (now Spectrum) Migrant Resource Centre. The project enabled a remembering and sharing of stories to contribute towards healing for the women participants, an opportunity for their voices and perspectives to be included in debates relating to asylum seekers, and an articulation of their hopes for the future. One of the participating women said, ‘For the first time we had the opportunity to get together, form a support network and produce a collective outcome’. At least 7000 people attended exhibitions and listened to the women sharing stories and experiences. Numbers can’t convey the power, intimacy and open-heartedness of exchanges between the women and the Australian community.

Shane Cooke has led the Sport and Recreation team at the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) for the past 12 months. CMY provides assistance to state sporting associations, regional sports assemblies, leisure centres and local government in the development of diversity and inclusion policies and strategies.

The team aims to increase the number of ongoing sporting opportunities for newly arrived, refugee and migrant young people. CMY addresses the health inequalities of these population groups by supporting the sport, government and community sectors to be more inclusive and to create and foster sport and active recreation opportunities for this target group. CMY has identified a range of aspects of sport and recreation that facilitate social inclusion, including sport and recreation as: a site for trust-building; a diversion strategy; a capacity-building opportunity; an entry point to broader participation; a way to promote health and wellbeing; a way to build community understanding; and a method of facilitating settlement and transitional support.

Louise Pianta is involved with the Art Carnivale creative expression workshops held on a monthly basis (third Sunday of the month) at the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre in West Melbourne. She was involved with similar workshops that were held in 2008 as part of the Light on the Path Ahead program.

Art Carnivale is a project that aims to provide people seeking asylum, their families and the wider community with the opportunity to work together to produce creative expressions of personal experiences, interests and motivations. Several different workshops run concurrently during the day, in which asylum seekers and local artists share their skills with each other in a number of creative mediums including screen printing, photography, Djing, toy making, filmmaking, weaving, dance, drama and music. All workshops are co-facilitated by artists from refugee backgrounds and artists from non-refugee backgrounds. Workshop participants and volunteers assisting with lunch preparation and supporting the workshops are also from a variety of backgrounds. People from all walks of life and diversity of backgrounds gather together to share their artistic skills, learn from others, meet new people, create a community and have the opportunity to express themselves creatively.
THE TWO FISHERMEN

There were once two friends. One of the men had a fishing rod and the other did not.

His friend went off and caught a wonderful large fish, bigger than any they had caught before.

A disagreement ensued and the two men went to a community elder to ask for mediation of the dispute.

Each day they would go fishing together. One would fish and the other would bring the fish to shore and prepare the catch for sale at the market. They did this for many years. Then one day the man who owned the rod got sick.

When he got back to the village his sick friend asked that they share the profits of the sale of this magnificent fish but his friend said no.

When they went to take the fish down the next morning, the birds had come and eaten it and only the bones remained.

From this story we learn that if you do not share with your brother you both lose.

Hang the fish high in this tall tree and I will think overnight and then come to you with an answer.

They did this and each went home for the night.

Cartoon drawn by Ezeldin Deng from a story told by Malika, an Eritrean elder
Migration Action is Australia’s only national independent journal devoted to refugee, immigration and multicultural issues. Published three times a year by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, it is edited by the Ecumenical Migration Centre, which has a 40-year history of leadership in this field. Since 1974 Migration Action has been a trusted information source, providing in-depth critical analysis and alternative views informed by casework and relationships with the communities affected by the issues. It seeks to promote informed discussion among decision-makers and the general public.