Anthroposalata unlimited
Possibilities for connecting community in Frankston

The Torch Project community consultation for the High Street multi-purpose centre

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September 2005
Acknowledgments

Anthroposalata Unlimited is the intellectual property of Amalia Sintihaki, a resident of the Mornington Peninsula who became involved with The Torch project at High Street. Amalia’s aim for Anthroposalata Unlimited was to invite the whole community to join and participate in a celebration of cultural diversity (more information about Anthroposalata Unlimited can be obtained through the Brotherhood of St Laurence).

The author would like to acknowledge the contribution of:

- The Torch Project team, especially its Director, Steve Payne
- the High Street Manager, Kevin Rogerson
- the workers from South Central Migrant Resource Centre, Rosemarie Draper and Mavra Vakalis, who introduced Amalia to the project
- Amalia Sintihaki who shared her idea, was generous with her time and played the character of Aphrodite
- and everyone who gave their time, energy and good will to make the event such fun and who have provided clear directions for the future of the multi-purpose centre in Frankston.

Thank you all.
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Summary

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) is keen to explore ways to facilitate community participation. In particular, we want to explore ways to involve people living on low incomes and include their ideas in decisions made about how we work with them and what we say and do on their behalf. To this end, The Torch Project (The Torch) was commissioned by the BSL to engage the communities in and near Frankston (Victoria, Australia) in a process that would firstly, inform the redevelopment of a complex of buildings in High Street Frankston into a multi-purpose centre and secondly, facilitate community ownership of the centre’s future through shared governance. These are the necessary first steps towards community participation, itself an essential ingredient in new models of governance being applied in Australia today.

The Torch Project blends art with community mobilisation. It aims to empower people to address difficult issues that otherwise often end up in the ‘too hard basket’, especially Indigenous issues and multicultural themes. The Torch Project works towards sustainable change.

The High Street Project

The BSL has a 30-year lease on the Uniting Church complex in High Street, Frankston. This site comprises a large church, a small hall, offices, storerooms, a kitchen, an old kindergarten complex and a four-bedroom house. When the congregation vacated the site, it was offered to the BSL because it was their wish for it to continue to serve the wider community of Frankston, particularly the more vulnerable.

There are two main ideas for the site: firstly, to maintain and develop a low-cost space and facilities where community groups can meet, organise and hold activities and secondly, to accommodate BSL and other funded services that would ensure the financial viability of the multi-purpose centre.

The long-term lease provided the BSL with the opportunity to deepen its existing relationship with the people of Frankston. For many years, the BSL has provided services in employment, transitions between school and work, public housing tenant advocacy and financial literacy. It also has a large retail store and provides accessible financial services. Staff of the BSL’s material aid service which operated till 2000 were looking to develop a resource/advocacy centre for people on low incomes. The decision to take over the lease of High Street was in some part influenced by that earlier vision.

Furthermore, the development and management of the High Street site provided an opportunity for the BSL to explore and trial models of community participation and collaboration inspired by examples from overseas (UK and USA). This has become particularly relevant in light of the Victorian Government’s desire for new ways of doing business involving community participation in decision making, and a recently announced partnership between the Victorian Government, Frankston City Council and the BSL.

The Torch Project and Anthroposalata Unlimited

Since its inception in 1997, The Torch has developed an extensive program of community cultural development in regional and metropolitan Victoria. The Torch was chosen by BSL because of the way it works: it provides a non-threatening public platform for marginalised communities and individuals who have few other opportunities to express their needs and desires. In this way, local social issues and community needs can be identified and addressed in an ongoing process that can be both inclusive and empowering.

Staff at the South Central Migrant Resource Centre put The Torch in contact with Amalia Sintihaki, a Greek-born woman living in the region, who gave her inspirational concept of ‘Anthroposalata Unlimited’ to the project. Anthroposalata loosely translated means ‘salad of
people’ and through it, Amalia aimed to celebrate cultural diversity. The partnership between SCMRC, The Torch, BSL/High Street and Amalia Sintihaki became part of a multi-faceted approach to seek information for the development of the site and was distinctive because of its method of engaging and consulting the community and the intention to also involve participants in the future governance of the project.

**Outcomes**

The Torch Project team successfully invited to the site members of non-English speaking and Indigenous Australian communities from Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula. BSL workers also participated in the process and in doing so, were able to find out which activities people wanted at the site and to involve them in an ongoing relationship with BSL at High Street.

The Torch engagement and consultation resulted in ‘Anthroposalata Unlimited’, a celebration of cultural diversity that was organised and held at High Street. Over two hundred people were involved in the development of the concept and in the event. The combination of The Torch and High Street provided Amalia Sintihaki with the first opportunity to trial Anthroposalata Unlimited and the results encouraged her to develop this into a multicultural, educational and entertaining program able to be replicated in a variety of settings.

The main issues raised during the development phase of ‘Anthroposalata Unlimited’ were the lack of connections between people and the lack of occasions for getting together. During and after the event many activities were suggested for the multi-purpose centre to enable a variety of people to connect.

The Torch process itself connected people and resulted in the formation of a group that are eager to develop activities in the multi-purpose centre and to improve access to existing resources. Moreover, a wider network was also established around High Street. This now includes Indigenous Australians and people from many non-English speaking backgrounds, as well as younger and older people.

The first steps towards community participation in new models of governance for the multi-purpose centre were taken. This group have adopted a café-style model of meeting together with the intention of developing activities at High Street. This model combines the place to enjoy social interaction with community mobilisation and action. As a result, the redevelopment plans have been modified to include a space for this café for community involvement.

The importance of paid workers as well as volunteers to The Torch process of community mobilisation became clear: skilled community development workers are necessary to support the early and ongoing stages of community engagement and participation.

The development of the multi-purpose centre at Frankston is a great opportunity for the BSL to explore a model of community participation that is valuable to all parties: those being engaged and consulted and those wanting to engage and consult. It builds on the BSL’s advocacy which has aimed to give voice to marginalised community members and to ensure their voices are heard by government when designing responses to disadvantage.
Introduction

BSL has a 30-year lease on the Wesley complex of buildings, now known as the High Street site. The complex is located in Frankston, which is about 40 kilometres from Melbourne CBD, at the end of metropolitan rail system. Frankston was settled early in the colonisation of Victoria: it has successively been a port, a military base, a holiday then retirement destination and later still, a source of affordable housing for lower-income households. Frankston is now undergoing a renewal of sorts, with increases in housing prices and the growth of retail and other services. A large public housing estate provides a stock of low-cost housing and other low-medium cost housing offered by the private rental market contributes to a higher proportion of low-income households than the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) average.

Compared with the MSD as a whole, Frankston has a higher rate of unemployment, especially amongst its young people, fewer of whom complete secondary school. Fewer people own their own homes, more are on lower incomes, a higher proportion are single parents and fewer residents have tertiary qualifications. A lower proportion of people born in non-English speaking countries live in Frankston than Melbourne (8.5 per cent compared with 21.3 per cent) and a slightly higher proportion identify as Indigenous Australians (0.5 per cent compared with 0.4 per cent).

BSL has had a presence in Frankston for many years and took up the lease on the High Street site with a vision of a multi-purpose centre that is a place where:

- people can get involved
- community groups can work together

and
- people can create new opportunities.

At the time of The Torch Project’s involvement, the redevelopment of the High Street site into a multi-purpose community centre was the responsibility of one BSL project manager. His brief was to ensure the future financial viability of the centre as well as providing a low-cost venue for a range of community-based, community-initiated activities. The main revenue stream for the centre will be rental of office space by BSL local and regional services as well as by a youth training enterprise (in partnership with another community service organisation).

Given the need for the rent-paying services and the organisation’s desire to engage the local community in the future ‘ownership’ of the centre, the BSL was interested in exploring at High Street different models of service delivery that rely on community participation. The project manager was working with BSL’s research and policy (R&P) unit to develop and trial different models. They were eager to trial an approach to delivering human services to disadvantaged households, informed by the work of Gilley (1995) and Beilherz (2002): this approach would draw upon local knowledge, strengths and resources. They also wanted to describe how to involve citizens over the medium to long term in participatory forms of governance.

Consultations

In 2002, as part of the preliminary discussions about potential site uses, the Brotherhood’s Research and Policy Unit was asked to consult the community to find out the views of local community services, of people who use BSL services and other local residents, on:

- local issues and needs
- activities and services that might take place in the Centre, and
- the Brotherhood’s vision for the Centre.
A more traditional survey of service providers and non-government organisations was undertaken in 2003 (Carbone & Ramburuth unpublished). It found the proposed multi-faceted use of the High Street site was welcome and was perceived to be of benefit to the local community. Respondents suggested a range of possibilities for the site: spaces which are informal and homelike, where people can make a cuppa and have a chat with others; weekend activities for young people; pick-up and drop-off by community transport; dedicated storage space for regular user groups, and low-cost access for community groups and organisations for training or events.

During 2004, The Torch Project was contracted to engage residents of Frankston and surrounds and consult them about the future of the site. The intention then was for this three month process of engagement and consultation to dovetail into building refurbishment and grounds landscaping that were already planned, with the results informing the development of activities.

The Torch was chosen to facilitate the process because of the aim to involve community in the governance of the site. The Torch works with community members to develop an arts-based event that reflects local issues. Such an engagement would help to identify ideas about activities for the site. Over a few months, it would also provide time and space for new relationships to grow and for local people to be involved in developing those activities and the site in general.

What is distinctive about this consultation is that it brought together the arts-based community mobilisation of The Torch Project, the BSL’s research and policy capacity and the BSL’s interest in developing innovative and evidence-based responses to contemporary policy directions. Previous community mobilisation undertaken by The Torch Project has not had such a specific focus on the development of such a significant community resource and previous consultations undertaken by BSL have not recruited participants through such a process or attempted to capture community interest and engage ‘subjects’ in the research outcomes.

The learnings from this stage were then fed into the next consultation of current BSL service users in Frankston undertaken by a private consultant in January 2005. Focus groups were asked about the kinds of activities they would like to see at the centre, how much the activities should cost and whether they could be involved in a voluntary capacity in making these activities happen. Many of these focus group members were eager to participate in varying degrees and some came along to a café-style meeting set up by The Torch participants.

There were significant similarities between the findings of each consultation and together they will inform the development of the High Street site.

This report has two main purposes:
- to document the process and results of The Torch community engagement and consultation
- to describe the distinctive process (that is, the part undertaken with The Torch team) and explore its legitimacy as a consultation method.

**Context**

Contemporary social policy in Australia and elsewhere reflects new ideas about the relationship between citizens and government. Social governance refers to a partnership approach that includes government, citizens and the private sector and relies on robust and inclusive methods of community participation. According to Stanley (2004), this way of governing is facilitated through the formation of partnerships and networks between organisations and the community. In this model:

People are empowered to participate through government policies which address personal and community disadvantages, commonly referred to as social exclusion and locational disadvantage (Stanley 2004, p.1).
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In Victoria, the Bracks Government has based its major response to disadvantage on partnerships that require long-term commitments from both government and community (Victorian Government 2005a). These initiatives aim to reduce disadvantage and promise families and communities a greater say in determining their own futures.

This ‘community’ includes community service organisations (CSOs) as well as groups and individuals. For such partnerships to be successful, individuals and marginalised groups require support to have their say and for their voices to be heard. Many CSOs are well placed to facilitate this participation, especially by using and adapting community development approaches, but this level of engagement and consultation is in addition to existing service tasks and requires additional resources. Inclusive and informed community participation in partnerships with government is expected to require ongoing support, information and skills development.

Accordingly the BSL is exploring various models in order to contribute to the body of knowledge around public participation in social governance. In Frankston in 2004, BSL held the first citizen jury comprising public housing tenants who deliberated on methods of involvement with their landlord, the Victorian Office of Housing (Bice 2005, Jope forthcoming).

This exploration has taken on greater importance since the announcement in the 2005–06 Victorian Budget of a new partnership between government, BSL and the City of Frankston to develop the multipurpose community facility. This is to be part of an exciting initiative in which the state government aims to change the way it works with communities:

Working together with the Victorian Government, local government, businesses and community agencies, the Brotherhood will take a leading role in integrating local planning and service delivery to address disadvantage in Frankston and achieve clearly targeted outcomes (Victorian Government 2005b, p.61)
2 Exploring a different process

As stated above, the intention behind using The Torch to facilitate this consultation was to assist BSL to engage the local community in the ongoing governance of the centre as well as in the development of activities. The aim was to capture energy mobilised during The Torch project and establish a process and describe a space that would enable ongoing engagement and ultimately facilitate active community exchange of information and views. This process and space may also be extended to enable conversations between citizens and other key institutions when required.

This approach to consultation was distinctive. An arts-based community cultural development project was used to recruit ‘subjects’ and to name and identify problems as well as solutions. A more traditional consultation process would attempt to recruit and select subjects more randomly, and would not attempt to engage them in the development of responses. The interest raised in the consultation phase is not necessarily captured for the development phase because those consulted might not be invited to shape the response. Therefore, by documenting The Torch process, this study attempts to demonstrate its strengths and the way similar processes could complement traditional methods.

What’s possible: The Torch Project at High Street

The Torch draws on a core of arts professionals as well as individuals from relevant local community groups to develop a community-controlled theatrical event that incorporates local issues, stories and participants. Community meetings identify themes and key contacts, workshops develop the script and performance and the event provides the opportunity to raise the issues and celebrate the connections made during the process.

The aims of The Torch facilitated community consultation for the High Street Site were:

- to engage the diverse communities of Frankston and surrounds in a process that informs the direction of the development of the church site and engenders community ownership of its future
- to explore key issues in the Frankston area under the themes of History, Culture, Identity and Belonging
- to create awareness within the Frankston community of the High Street project; its philosophy and purpose.

Its key objectives were:

- to gain permission from the Bunnurong people to undertake the project
- to conduct a series of meetings and workshops with a broad cross-section of organisations and individuals that lead to the development of an ongoing steering committee
- to produce a small scale, inclusive and accessible arts event that reflects the key issues of the consultation.

Method

The Torch’s expertise in engaging and mobilising community was supplemented by the research skills of BSL’s Social Action and Research staff who undertook to document the consultation and to explore how this process could inform a model of ongoing community consultation and participation for the multi-purpose centre.

The results of the consultation process were captured through:

- listing the icons, landmarks and issues that characterise Frankston
- a small survey of participants and event audience
- documenting feedback session and brainstorm of activities, two weeks after the event
• description of a model of ongoing community involvement.

The consultation was advised by a team that included two members of The Torch, the executive officer and the company manager; the High Street Project Manager and a Research and Policy Project Manager. The process included a series of community meetings, workshops held in the week leading up to the event, the event itself and the feedback session.

Community meetings and workshops develop the script

Four community meetings held over three months provided the opportunity for people to get to know and work with The Torch team. Through a series of exercises, issues about life in Frankston were raised, a script was outlined and a performance and celebration of community diversity was planned. Using a snowball method of recruitment, contacts were identified and overall 141 individuals and organisations were invited to participate, see Table 1. Contact was made by email and phone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation type</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
<th>Organisation type</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>High Street users</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSL Peninsula staff</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>BSL General Managers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Frankston Council</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agencies &amp; organisations</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Frankston Business Chamber</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local churches</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Indigenous community</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School principals</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seventy-two people actually participated in The Torch community engagement/consultation process. They included people from the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Frankston Community Health Centre, Centrelink, Salvation Army, the Peninsula Carers Council, Anglicare, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services, High Street Uniting Church, Alcoholics Anonymous, Local Learning and Employment Network, City of Frankston and SkillsPlus.

Workers from the South Central Multicultural Resource Centre (SCMRC) based on the Mornington Peninsula provided significant support and important contact with groups of older migrants. Few young people took part in the initial community meetings, but more became involved during the workshops, and the second narrative theme featured issues from a youth perspective.

Representatives from the Frankston Business Chamber and the local schools, the police and the Frankston Community Arts sector were invited but did not attend. Two groups under-represented were users and providers of BSL services, as well as members of the community groups already using the buildings at High Street. These organisations need to be targeted for future conversations.

The process is celebrated at the event

Promotion of the event to the wider community was by word of mouth, by fliers letterboxed to local residents and by media release to the local press.

On the day of the celebration, a BBQ lunch was provided by the BSL for all involved in rehearsals and setting up arts and crafts displays. Mural panels were painted with Indigenous designs and other symbols representing the cultural backgrounds of those present. Several multicultural groups from the Frankston/Mornington Peninsula area exhibited their traditional arts and crafts in the foyer of the building.

Twenty-eight people, approximately 20 per cent of the audience, were surveyed during interval using a short questionnaire. Their ages ranged from twelve years to seventy with the majority in the 12–25 and 36–50 year age groups. The majority were from Frankston and surrounding areas and had heard about the event from people who were participating. A minority had only been in the
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audience and not involved in any other part of the event. A video recording was made of the performance and a rough edit (15 minutes) of highlights was made.

Feedback session
Thirty people attended the feedback session held two weeks after the event. These included a cross-section of the different cultural backgrounds and age groups, as well as a good mix of individuals, members of community groups and CSO workers. They were asked what was good about the event and its organisation and what could have been better. They were then asked about what activities they would like at the High Street site, and how much they would like to be involved in the planning and implementation of these activities.
3 Discovering what’s possible

The Torch facilitated the involvement of a large number of people from diverse cultural backgrounds. At least one Indigenous elder participated in all meetings and guided the process. Her presence ensured the final event was acceptable to the local elders and custodians of the land. From the first meeting there were constant reminders of the first peoples who lived with this land and of the existence of other sacred, secret and esoteric knowledge not available to all. Young Indigenous Australians performed dances and sang during the public performance and Indigenous elders prepared food for the dinner and oversaw the painting of murals.

Through the SCMRC, many older people from non-English speaking backgrounds took part and the ‘Anthroposalata Unlimited’ concept was adapted as one of two main performance narratives from the work of a local Greek-born, Australian woman. The other narrative developed by younger members of The Torch Project reflected issues and icons identified through the community meeting process. Together they raised issues confronting young people and people from diverse cultural backgrounds in Frankston.

From the meetings

At the initial meeting, small groups were asked to reflect on Frankston according to the themes of culture, history, identity and place.

Culture

According to those present, respect for diversity and the need to create the spaces where people can meet and fill the gaps between cultures were both very important. People felt multiculturalism was hidden but ‘happening’.

Identity

Participants identified Frankston as city not country, the hub of the region and the cultural centre. They felt that the city was attempting to develop pride by improving amenities, but Frankston was often contrasted to the more upmarket and wealthy Mount Eliza. Here the stigma about living in Frankston—related to crime, drugs and unemployment—was first introduced.

Belonging

The primary issue was ‘the need for enjoyment for everyone’ to build a sense of belonging. Sharing information about and between services would ‘stop (people) falling through gaps’.

History

Discussion of local history focused on places rather than individuals. Whereas once the coming of the train line had been hailed as a sign of positive development, now the railway station was described as a place to be avoided. The history of the High Street site as the settlers’ church, as well as the significance of the site to the local Indigenous people, was identified as important.

People talked about not being valued and a lack of pride in their town and community. They identified deficits that probably contribute to that feeling: poor public transport, shortage of affordable housing, lack of opportunity and confidence to access resources, lack of appropriate resources and accessible information, isolation, family disconnection, absence of community connectedness, and lack of representation, and disempowerment.

The main concern raised under three of the themes (not history) was the lack of strong connections amongst people living in the region. Too many barriers were felt to be keeping people apart (including stereotyping, lack of pride, lack of knowledge and lack of access to knowledge). People
suggested a non-threatening focal point for the community and network development would go some way to strengthening their sense of belonging and overcoming these deficits.

**Frankston icons and landmarks**

At the second meeting, through a series of exercises using drawings, sculpture and song, participants identified Frankston landmarks, icons, stories and characters which were used in the development of the script for the performance.

Frankston’s distinguishing features included its mix of suburb, sea and country all within five minutes of each other; its location as the last station on the rail line or the gateway to the peninsula; its role as the peninsula’s cultural; dolphins (the local footy team, the city logo and the real thing in the bay); Kananook Creek and the bridge over it; the beach; the shopping centre; the Peninsula Centre (which is an eyesore!); the pier; the 21st nightclub (described as ‘dodgy’ and referred to as ‘the rotisserie’); Oliver’s Hill; the flags that line the streets and the annual Christmas tree.

**Workshops**

Local issues, characters and icons discussed during the meetings were included in the script that was developed during workshops in the week leading up to the event. The ‘Anthroposalata Unlimited’ concept was introduced and the workshops provided the opportunity to integrate this theme with the main narrative from the community meetings.

**Anthroposalata Unlimited**

The planning group wanted the event to be an opportunity for people to get together, to raise awareness of the different local cultures and ‘to celebrate this community’ with food and a performance highlighting those issues that people felt needed to be aired. Community members, provided with small amounts of money, prepared dishes from their many cultures. Approximately 150 people did get together for the multicultural dinner and participated in the performance of ‘Anthroposalata Unlimited’.

At the event, representatives from the BSL and SCMRC welcomed people and The Torch director introduced the performance. As well as the two narratives, the show featured a belly dancer, Zorba’s Dance and the Lebanese Dubkah and a Chilean dance group performed after interval.

All audience and cast members surveyed at interval were unanimous in their support for the event and the hope that similar events would be held in the future. What most people enjoyed was the celebration of the social, cultural and generational mix:

- the enthusiasm and commitment, and the mix of people
- the age range and the cultural range
- the community coming to enjoy a beautiful celebration.

A minority felt the day could have been improved if it had involved more people, been better promoted and if the arts-based activity had been ongoing.

A little under half of those surveyed indicated they would like to have some further relationship with High Street through membership of the steering group, sharing skills, being kept informed and/or participating in the next Torch Project.

**Feedback session**

Overall the comments two weeks later from the participants were very positive about the event and how they felt about being part of it:
The show left me on a high for at least a week. I loved all the nationalities coming together: the differences, racism, judgments went out the window.

Everyone got along so well, I was surprised

I was honoured by the participation of Indigenous people. It made it perfect for me. Thank you.

Some constructive criticisms were also ventured about the format of the show and its limited publicity, with the view that more people could and would have participated and enjoyed the event if they had known about it.

This feedback session was the final meeting facilitated by The Torch Project.

**Brainstorm**

After the feedback session, participants were asked to describe their vision (informed by the experience of The Torch process) of the High Street site and the activities they would like to see there.

Their vision was of a place for people to connect across age, cultural and social divisions. This could include:

- a café-style drop-in centre that also provides access to computers and the internet
- a place where an exchange of languages, culture, histories, craft, art, music and dance can take place and where skills and capabilities can be developed
- a place to link up with and find out about other things happening in the Frankston area
- office space for community groups to organise activities, excursions and events
- a place for outdoor events including markets and entertainment.

The activities suggested were regular, affordable and accessible arts-based events, including weekend activities, which would maintain the momentum established by The Torch. The site provides ideal spaces for theatre development and rehearsal, and was considered accessible to low-income households who often lack resources and confidence to get involved with existing amateur theatre groups.

Other activities suggested included tai chi, yoga and other physical activities for the aged and people with disabilities (possibly funded by VicHealth). Several people expressed interest in making the exterior of the building and the grounds attractive, with community gardens and landscaping to reflect the multicultural community.

Participants recommended better communication and promotion of the activities to take place at and from centre.

In addition, those present wanted BSL and the High Street project staff to help them achieve this vision and help them provide the suggested activities. They understood that the site’s uses are limited by council’s planning process and zoning regulations and the requirements of BSL services.

These initial results will require further investigation when the site is refurbished and BSL is able to develop new activities, considered to be new uses for the site. The refurbishment of the buildings has been delayed by the local government development application procedure.
4 Reflections on the process

A key issue identified during the consultation and reflected in the performance was the lack of positive connections between the variety of people in this area and to a lesser extent between people and place. The community meetings raised some interesting episodes in Frankston’s history (a riot, a series of murders), and identified some icons (local night club, the bay, the football team) and characters (homeless person, the busker). Social problems evident in Frankston were mentioned, and also reflected in the performance. These included the differences between life stages, culture, place of birth, etc., that kept people apart; and substance abuse, violence, racism, bullying, homophobia and teen pregnancy that were seen to result from this isolation.

Given these results, how well were the aims and objectives of The Torch consultation/engagement process met?

Engaging diversity

The Torch Project did engage the diverse communities of Frankston and surrounds in a process that can inform the development of the multi-purpose centre and engender community ownership of its future. Members of The Torch team involved Indigenous Australians living and working in the Frankston area and gained permission to undertake the project on Bunnurong land. Indigenous people attended each community meeting and many participated in a variety of ways in the community event. This participation was very important to the author of Anthroposalata Unlimited and provided an opportunity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to meet.

The Torch Project also mobilised the energy of two part-time, Peninsula-based multicultural workers from the SCMRC, who introduced the author of ‘Anthroposalata Unlimited’ and contacted other older members of language-specific community groups. The SCMRC workers transported these members to meetings and many provided food, exhibited arts and crafts and took part in the event. Many of these residents who migrated to Australia several decades ago and are now retired or semi-retired were very happy to be involved with other non-ethnic groups and different age groups. They wanted more.

During the brainstorm process these elderly residents suggested they would like to take part in more non-ethno-specific activities at High Street, to meet with other older migrants as well as with people of all ages.

These SCMRC workers were also eager to explore with peninsula-based BSL Aged and Community Care the delivery of culturally appropriate services to their target group.

Ongoing connections

The survey of audience and performers found two part-time, Peninsula-based multicultural workers from the SCMRC, who introduced the author of ‘Anthroposalata Unlimited’ and contacted other older members of language-specific community groups. The SCMRC workers transported these members to meetings and many provided food, exhibited arts and crafts and took part in the event. Many of these residents who migrated to Australia several decades ago and are now retired or semi-retired were very happy to be involved with other non-ethnic groups and different age groups. They wanted more.

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Ongoing connections

The survey of audience and performers found almost half of respondents were interested in some further involvement with the High Street project through either joining a steering committee, being informed about future events, sharing skills and interests and/or being part of future Torch events. Some people offered various amounts of time, from two hours to two days a week. This would provide much-needed support for running the High Street centre and would develop the capacity of the ‘community’ to network in the Frankston area.

Involvement with the High Street site provides people with the opportunity to connect and to address some of the issues raised. The BSL’s plans for the High Street site were explained at the first community meeting and all activities took place at the centre. It is difficult to determine how well the philosophy and purpose behind the community engagement and consultation was understood by those who took part or by the Frankston community in general. Ongoing interaction will be required to explore this and to ensure the BSL also reflects community needs in the development of the site. However, the immediate response to the event was positive, with the
social/cultural mix most consistently identified as what was enjoyed most and ‘more of the same’ being what BSL could be doing in Frankston.

**Café of possibilities**

The consultation process (community meetings, event and feedback meeting) provided BSL with a number of directions it can take in the development of activities and the centre. The most immediate was to support a café-style drop-in centre (see page 17) as a space for ongoing participation of community in the centre’s development and future governance. With support, the café could provide an affordable point of access to information, knowledge, education, training, social interaction and health services.

After the feedback session, a group of people met and organised one café, especially for those involved in Anthroposalata but open to others. Another was planned for the following month to enable more people (especially BSL service users) to be involved. More detail about the Café of Possibilities—so named by its supporters after the concept used by Yoland Wadsworth (personal communication)—will be provided in a separate report.

**Distinctive process, common themes**

Using the results of an art-based approach engaging community members, to inform the development of the multi-purpose centre, as The Torch team did, is a very different approach from typical community consultations. What is interesting is that it yielded similar findings to the earlier consultation with Frankston area community service organisations, and to the snapshot survey of BSL service users and centre user groups that took place after The Torch project. Questions posed during The Torch process informed the later survey.

All three consultations found the lack of opportunities/places to connect with others—apart from hotels and clubs—and the perception of a lack of security, personal or public, was keeping people apart, feeling isolated in their own homes.

The perception of Frankston as unsafe was a predominant issue in the group discussions and was reflected in Anthroposalata Unlimited. Drugs, bashings, obscene language, robberies and excessive alcohol use were all identified as aspects of this lack of security. Several participants openly stated that they ‘didn’t like’ living in Frankston, while many did like it. During its focus group discussions, the BSL was warned that they should not allow High Street to become another unsafe space in Frankston.

A recurrent theme was the need for a place of intentional community connections outside of pubs and clubs—particularly for young people and women. Participants confirmed that while there were ample sports facilities (which were seen as suitable for some young children and reasonably fit adults), these did not cater for many teenagers or adults who could not afford the fees or considered themselves too unfit. There were few non-alcohol based social opportunities for people. Younger participants said that people their age tended to ‘hang out’ in shopping areas or meet in pre-arranged groups at each other homes. Women without access to transport needed a meeting facility close to the centre of Frankston, for which High Street is ideally located.

The need for affordable meeting facilities for community groups, for subsidised skills and health-related community activities and for a local area directory function to link disparate community services were made clear in all three stages of the consultation.

Existing community groups in Frankston were united in their need for centrally located, affordable meeting facilities with free parking. Groups also want secure storage space, equipment (e.g. whiteboards) and access to computers and printers.
Activities that contribute to the well-being of the Frankston community were also suggested. They included subjects such as financial planning, computer training, managing a band, hospitality skills, vegetable gardening and basic vehicle and bike maintenance. These course-style activities could provide a structured place in which to build relationships and allow people to develop their skills.

Social activities such as crafts, non-gambling games and group discussions were also suggested to provide community opportunities for social interaction.

Many participants, in both the focus group interviews and The Torch, were keen to contribute to the running of such a centre.

**Strengths and weaknesses**

The aims of The Torch Project were all met although at different levels. The diverse communities of Frankston were engaged and informed the future development of the site. The Bunnurong people granted permission to undertake the project and also took part. Relationships between BSL at High Street and members of the Indigenous and ethnic communities were strengthened.

The series of meetings and workshops conducted with this broad cross-section of organisations and individuals led initially to an organising group for the event and to an ongoing group of people interested in developing and owning future activities on the site. A small-scale, inclusive and accessible arts event that reflected key issues of the consultation was produced and enjoyed by many.

For the High Street site, the main strength of this approach is that the energy raised and connections made during the lengthy engagement and consultation were captured for the multi-purpose centre to build on.

In addition to useful findings, The Torch process also generated a lot of fun. It raised a lot of issues about identity and belonging and aired them in public, and connected a lot of people through the shared creative process. The BSL obtained its information and the people involved had a great time and created an event that celebrated their developing sense of community.

One possible weakness of The Torch approach is that centre activities identified using the arts-based consultation reflected an arts bias: a majority of those consulted wanted to repeat The Torch experience. However, other activities—related to health, fitness, crafts, games, languages, to name a few—were also identified and the findings were complemented by those of the other consultations.

Furthermore, an emphasis on arts activities would only be a weakness if community arts and community building were seen to be separate. Fortunately, this is not the case: in a preliminary analysis of the role of the arts in building social inclusion, Barraket (2005) found significant evidence of arts-based initiatives and activities playing a role in achieving social inclusion outcomes for disadvantaged individuals, groups and communities.
5 Emerging possibilities

In addition to considering how well the process met the stated aims and objectives of The Torch project, this study has also examined how the process developed networks, strengthened community, built the capacity of community to participate in decision-making and helped to form an ongoing consultation process that would include the voices and ideas of more marginalised groups and individuals.

Mobilising community

The Torch was chosen to facilitate this consultation not only to engage Indigenous Australians and people from non-English speaking backgrounds, but also to do so in a way that mobilised community action. The intention was to engage, consult and then to involve community members in developing a process and a space in which they could comfortably exchange information and views. This could then provide a place for ongoing consultations with these more marginalised members of the Frankston community, for community participation in the governance of the High Street site, and for extending knowledge about community engagement and participation.

What became clear early in the project was that the desired community action requires involvement of paid community workers as well as residents. Additional resources had not been made available by the BSL and the demands of The Torch (for support with contacting community, inviting participation and maintaining involvement) were not easily met. With a dedicated community development worker, recruitment and promotion for the project could have been improved and the energy and enthusiasm could have been sustained more successfully after The Torch left.

‘Café of Possibilities’

Those with an interest in the next steps met and, with strong support from SCMRC and BSL, decided to start the ‘Café of Possibilities’ as a way of working together, based on the ‘conversation/world café’. The use of tables and chairs, tablecloths, food was central to this model and provided a less formal venue for people to meet and develop the community-owned space and activities. This facilitates connections identified in all consultations and allows more structured conversations to take place:

> The World Café is an innovative methodology that enhances the capacity for collaborative thinking about critical issues by linking small-group and large-group conversations. It has a contribution to make when the goal is the focused networks of conversations to foster collective insight around real-life challenges and key strategic questions, to create the futures we want to create. (Brown et al. 2001, p.2)

This format will continue to be trialled and evaluated as a process of inclusion and ongoing community participation and deliberative exchange in the governance of the High Street centre.

Unfortunately there has been a time lag between The Torch event and the development of activities identified. Meanwhile, the ongoing café-style process enabled BSL to extend relations with individuals and other organisations, who have found a community space at High Street. The café has also provided a place for people to meet and overcome their lack of connections.
6 Conclusions and recommendations

As a result of The Torch project, connections have been formed between:
- BSL and SCMRC
- the High Street project and the community
- individuals involved in the event.

Through the High Street Project, BSL is developing a strong relationship with the SCMRC. A common agenda needs to be negotiated to develop future activities together at High Street and across other areas of shared responsibility, for example, aged care services to people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The Torch also enabled the BSL to showcase potential uses of High Street to the local community and as a result there is a strong desire from some groups and individuals to base their activities there.

The combination of The Torch and High Street provided the first opportunity to trial ‘Anthroposalata Unlimited’ and the results gave the author the determination to develop her idea into a multicultural, educational and entertaining program to be duplicated in a variety of settings.

Members of the various ethnic groups who participated in ‘Anthroposalata Unlimited’ wanted to mix again and suggested activities for all older residents with and without migrant backgrounds, as well as with younger people.

The decision to explore the conversation café as a process to engage community in the development of the site is exciting. It has enabled some of the momentum created by The Torch to be maintained during the development application process. It has also successfully engaged BSL service users and others. Using this method at High Street, the Brotherhood can work with community members to strengthen their capacity to participate in decision making in a number of areas. Initially, BSL will be able to include service users in planning and evaluating its services as well as new activities at the centre. Other citizens can also be involved in developing collaborative responses to disadvantage that require the participation of government, the private sector and civil society.

What is required to take these opportunities forward?

To continue the engagement and consultation of community members in an ongoing and open manner, it has become clear that a dedicated community development position needs to be attached to the project. At the least, skilful, energetic and continuous on-site coordination of volunteers and sponsors is necessary to maintain the café process. Moreover, high levels of community development skills, as well as time, are required to support individuals in this endeavour. This should be an initial role for BSL.

Once the site is rezoned and BSL is free to increase activities and pursue the further involvement of the broader Frankston Community, the next step is to ensure that everyone who took part in Anthroposalata Unlimited is contacted and encouraged to contribute to planning future activities and directions of the centre.

The real value to the Frankston community of the High Street site is that it offers an alternative for social interaction for those who have low incomes or whose needs are not met at existing venues. Its size and facilities can accommodate a range of activities developed by volunteers who, in doing so, may be overcoming their isolation. It is essential that people using the centre feel safe and that the buildings are attractive to all residents.
The development of the multi-purpose centre at Frankston is a great opportunity for the BSL to explore how it can develop a model of community participation that is valued by all parties, especially those being engaged and consulted and those wanting to engage and consult. In particular, it builds on the BSL’s advocacy which has aimed to give voice to marginalised community members and to ensure their voices are heard by government when designing responses to disadvantage.
References


