

Engaging with youth and diversity in Western Sydney: Implementing and evaluating a film-making project for community renewal

Need for the project

Mt Druitt, part of the Blacktown local government area of Western Sydney, and Campbelltown, also in Sydney's west, are areas of relative disadvantage. Both areas have a high percentage of public housing estate residents (13% in Mt Druitt and 16% in Campbelltown) and a high proportion of residents born overseas (over a third of the population in Mt Druitt and a quarter in Campbelltown). These 2 areas show significant socio-economic disadvantage with high levels of unemployment (13.3% in Mt Druitt and 10% in Campbelltown) and low qualifications (only 12% have a degree or higher qualifications in Mt Druitt and 9% in Campbelltown)¹.

The lack of education and access to resources means that marginalised groups are less enabled to critically question and reflect on their social condition. These barriers prevent people from diverse backgrounds from participating in all levels of society. Youth are at a particular disadvantage and projects which develop young people's skills to engage with their communities are in demand throughout the Western Sydney region.

There is, therefore, a need for a collaborative project with the culturally diverse young people living in the housing estates of Bidwill, Minto, Emerton, Airs and Claymore, for example, to encourage the understanding of alternative modes of action to address and redress issues of social exclusion such as violence and poverty.

This project is one component of a larger project of *Community Leadership in Western Sydney* which aims to help community leaders learn more about ways to inspire and support residents to be actively involved in acting upon community issues. In this project 'emerging' leaders are supported by 'recognised' leaders. Workshops are organised for 'recognised' leaders who are then each expected to work with several 'emerging' leaders. The recognised and emerging leaders are engaged in a process of action research and learning that is intensively supported by project staff from the Centre for Popular Education and local partners.

We believe that a community cultural development (CCD) project will address those needs and help young people re-engage with and strengthen community, culture and democracy.

This CCD project for marginalised young people will be a film-making project devised in collaboration with an artist working with marginalised young people from diverse cultural backgrounds and local government and organisations. The project

¹ ABS (2002) Basic Community Profile. Canberra: ABS.

Dowling, R. & Mee, K. (2001) "Tales of the City: Western Sydney at the end of the millennium" in Connell, J. (Ed.) *Sydney: The emergence of a world city*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.273-291.

will bring together up to 50 marginalised young from Mt Druitt and Campbelltown. We intend to develop the practical skills, artistic dialogue and collaborative and consultative processes involving young people based on the thematic exploration of ideas relating to being young in Western Sydney, social exclusion, cultural diversity and leadership.

Projects that attempt to redress socio-economic disadvantage need to be sustainable to be effective. Further, there is a need to evaluate the long-term impact of such a project on its participants and their community. This project will address that need. To date, there has been little evaluation of the long-term outcomes of CCD. Much of the existing evaluation focuses primarily on short-term outcomes (e.g. audience participation and appreciation) and the quality of project management. There are currently no detailed indicators to help CCD practitioners measure the extent to which their work is bringing about long-term outcomes.

Objectives of the project

We intend to engage with young people from Mt Druitt and Campbelltown areas through the contacts established and the relationships built working on the existing Centre for Popular Education's Community Leadership Program running in those areas.

The objectives of this project are two fold. First, we intend to develop the artistic and creative skills of young people in Western Sydney as well as provide a vehicle for self-expression for the young participants in order to increase opportunities for exercising leadership, learning and change. Second we intend to develop a set of indicators with a particular focus on working with young people from diverse backgrounds to help CCD practitioners systematically identify and describe evidence and make judgements about the long-term impact as well as reflect on the value of their work.

This project aims to:

- bring together people engaged in diverse forms of education, community development, arts and social action
- provide the means for self-expression for a group of marginalised young people
- enhance learning and working together and mentor emerging young leaders from diverse backgrounds in the Campbelltown and Blacktown LGA.
- further investigate thematic material developed by marginalised young people in Western Sydney with a professional film-maker
- strengthen relationships between local leaders engaged in diverse forms of community development, arts, education and advocacy
- encourage and support a whole-of-community process of learning, action and evaluation
- engage with and foster participation of young emerging leaders in the Western Sydney area
- improve quality of life, particularly for those young people from diverse cultural backgrounds experiencing social exclusion
- develop leaders or activists who are passionate about developing their local communities

- provide a meaningful arts experience for young people
- facilitate access and participation of young people living and frequenting the Campbelltown and Mt Druitt areas to a quality arts and events that references their lifestyle and sense of place
- acknowledge the lifestyles, choices and expression of differences by a diverse community of young people
- evaluate the impact of participating in a CCD project in terms of learning and change.

Outcomes to be achieved by the project

We propose to develop 2 distinct groups of up to 25 young people in each respective area around consultation sessions and workshops. The 2 groups will work on devising a film each to be shown at local events to be decided on at a later date. The 2 groups will also come together at a forum convened by the Centre in December 2003 at the University of Technology, Sydney.

The proposed starting date is July 2003 with a completion date of December 2003. We envisage a 2 months front-end development period, between July and August, followed by a 4 months production and editing period between September and December. Metro Screen, Sydney will be contracted to work with the 2 groups of young people approximately once a week for 4 months.

Products

During topic-based and skills-based workshops thematic material will be explored and developed into a script and film-making skills will be acquired. Within these workshops there will be room for whole-group as well as small group activities.

These activities will culminate in the production of a co-authored film and associated products (e.g. poster, brochure, report, etc.) that both in form and content will be relevant to the young participant, their lifestyles, cultural beliefs and geographical location. The film will then be launched at a forum convened by the Centre for Popular Education and screened at a variety of local events.

Learning and change

The project will build upon and extend the knowledge and experiences of the participants. There will be a focus on issues and problems that are particular to the two respective local areas. Value will be placed on the young people's knowledge and perspectives as expert. This will lay the groundwork for building a whole-of-community approach to analysing and acting on chosen issues.

We expect that the project participants will gain some short-term and long-term outcomes.

The short-term outcomes for the young participants will include:

- learning about ways to inspire and support others
- participating in community initiatives in order to act upon community issues
- learning about organisational structures
- locating and mobilising local resources

- building social and organisational networks
- learning how to plan, make decisions and collaborate with artists and local organisations
- learning how to document and evaluate the project activities and achievements
- greater knowledge and understanding of how diverse fields of practice, government and non-government agencies can contribute to community development.

The long-term outcomes for the young participants will include:

- a stronger commitment and interest by a wide range of stakeholders in the issues relevant to young people living in Campbelltown and Mt Druitt
- a stronger 'culture' of exchange, sharing, networking and collaboration at a local level
- stronger and energised local 'emerging' leaders
- more robust and more participatory local democracy
- recognition and support for local 'emerging' leaders
- strengthened capacity in local communities to address issues of development and social exclusion
- an increased capacity to exercise leadership and recognise acts of leadership.

Method for achieving objectives and outcomes

The Centre for Popular Education undertakes research, consulting and teaching activities that are concerned with education and community capacity building. In particular, the Centre is intent on studying and supporting educational practice that serves the interests of people who are marginalised, or/and are engaged in advocacy, social action or community development activities. Centre members research and teach in a range of arenas, including schools, health promotion, youth work/education, arts and cultural development, international and community development, adult and community education, basic education, social movements and unions.

The Centre has six major research program areas. They are:

1. Community leadership
2. Community cultural development
3. Pedagogy and politics of working with young people
4. Health education and community development
5. Learning and action for the environment
6. Education and advocacy (current work with consumer groups, and refugee advocacy groups)

For this proposed project, the Centre for Popular Education will be able to draw on staff with considerable experience, including:

- Rick Flowers, Director
- Celina McEwen, Project Coordinator and Research Fellow
- Daniel Ng, Manager.

Our local partners include:

- Blacktown City Council
- Campbelltown City Council

- TAFE
- Centre for Social Leadership, Benevolent Society
- Animation Project, St Vincents de Paul
- Blacktown Alcohol and Drugs Family Service

Evaluation method

The Centre for Popular Education will convene regular project meetings to ensure that the various stages of the project are proceeding according to the timeframe. The Centre has a competent management structure supported by the significant research management infrastructure of the University of Technology, Sydney.

As one of the objectives of the project is an evaluation tool for community cultural development projects, the proposed evaluation will focus on setting up a system for continuous research and monitoring of the progress of the project. To be consistent with the spirit of project's commitment to experiential learning and action research processes it is proposed that the evaluation will provide a structured method of helping participants reflect on their experiences and actions in order to process their learning.

Celina McEwen will act as evaluation consultant on this project. The evaluation research methodologies will include fieldwork and ongoing liaison with all stakeholders. The data will be collected from both participants and practitioners using focus group discussions, interviews, questionnaires, observation and the film. The documentation of the participants' reflection will form an important part of the evaluation data as well as the data gathered from the staff and artists from partner organisations and other peripheral community members. The research will focus on informants' views and opinions on the processes used and product generated rather than on life-stories. For formal interviews and observation, the researcher will guarantee full anonymity of data collected.

The data will be collected between July and December 2003. An acquittal report will be produced according to Brencorp's timeline requirements. The de-identified data will then be used to produce a report evaluating the project according to the indicators agreed upon between the project stakeholders. A draft evaluation report will be available by approximately April and completed in June 2003. The report will be disseminated to all project stakeholders, available through the Centre for Popular Education's bookshop and online and finally findings presented at relevant forums and conferences. A successful project with sound evaluation will provide a best practice model for community development projects nationwide.

The outcomes and evaluation achieved by this project will be built on for further work with the communities identified by being fed back into the larger 2 year long project of *Community Leadership in Western Sydney*. This project will provide further opportunities for the young participants to engage with other 'emerging' as well as 'recognised' leaders by facilitating peer education and encouraging acts of leadership. Activities such as leadership dinners and residential workshops with 'recognised' local leaders have been planned and will ensure the sustainability of the project.

We anticipate no project risks affecting Brencorp Foundation funding nor potential conflicts of interest or sensitivities that may result from funding this project and its evaluation.