

Evaluating Big *hART*'s *SMASHED* Project: Building Bridges for Personal, Social and Institutional Change



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“Binge drinking is not the sort of thing you take a pill for”

(Community Partner).

When you talk about diversity and inclusion, it really is just creating access to opportunity for those who have generally been under represented and underserved. (Patton)

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Introduction

This report provides an evaluation of Big *hART*'s ***SMASHED*** project. It considers both the processes and products of the project, and foregrounds both its successes and challenges. Recommendations are presented in the light of these outcomes. First, the background to the project is overviewed. Next, the evaluation methodology is presented. The project is considered in terms of its scope and significance, and evidence is presented in relation to both outputs and outcomes. Finally, a series of conclusions and recommendations are presented.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Project

SMASHED was a creative response developed conjointly by Big *hART* with community to the National Binge Drinking Strategy and funded through the National Binge Drinking Strategy Community Level Initiative. This strategy occurs in a national context where 10 million Australians experience the negative consequences of a strangers drinking each year, and where the costs to Australia as a whole in alcohol related harm is \$36 billion (Lasslett, et al., 2010).

When Tasmania as state is considered, the Tasmanian Alcohol and Drug Service reports that the state has the nation's highest proportion of young people who drink at risky levels, with 19.8% of 18-24 year olds drinking alcohol at risky or high levels causing short-term harm. This is the highest rate in Australia compared with a

national average of 15.3%. In a local context where *SMASHED* was delivered, a survey conducted for the project highlighted that while 30% of young people (15-16 year olds) had not had an alcoholic drink in the last year, 22% had in the last two months and a further 22% had in the last two weeks. 20% approximately of those surveyed had participated in a binge-drinking event. It is this troubling picture that provides a context within which Big *hART* worked.

Big *hART* is Australia's most awarded Participatory Arts organisation with a substantial track record of delivering successful projects and outcomes to challenging social issues (MacCallum, et al., 2006; P. R Wright, 2009b; P.R Wright & Palmer, 2007, 2009). Through Big *hART*'s collaborative processes, a short film competition featuring 12 short films developed by project participants was held in the Metro Theatre Burnie, then toured to participating high schools.

The focus of the project was on "*Challenging young people on the North West Coast of Tasmania to tackle the issue of youth binge drinking through a community based media project*". Through this project young people on Tasmania's North West coast were provided with digital tools and taught skills that enabled them to be both researchers and creators providing a young person's perspective on binge drinking. Mentored by Big *hART*'s successful team, young people—one group often denied a voice in the community where they live—presented challenging, insightful, humorous, and provocative perspectives on an issue that is part of their own lived experience and social milieu in which they live.

As a project ***SMASHED*** was delivered across four schools—Burnie High School, Wynyard High School, Latrobe High School, and Marist College (Burnie)—in three locations on the North West Coast (Burnie, Wynyard and Latrobe). The Film festival,

the most significant output of the project to date, featured 12 short films, involving 39 student filmmakers. These films and the creative collaborative processes used to develop them drew significantly on project partners, and the partnerships developed through them.

SMASHED was funded to \$148, 235 for 12 months from the National Binge Drinking Strategy Community Level Initiative. This amount was then supplemented by a further \$20,000 from the Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation. This lies in contrast to the usual life cycle of Big *hARTS* projects that traditionally would run for 150 weeks with a commensurately higher budget. In this sense, and when considered relative to internationally awarded projects such as *900 Neighbours* and *The Northcott Narratives Project* (P.R Wright & Palmer, 2007, 2009), **SMASHED** can be seen as pilot project where reach and impact was limited both by funding and available time.

What this evaluation reveals is that **SMASHED** provides a striking example of productive engagement of young people and community around a critical social issue that can be replicated elsewhere.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

This evaluation is built on multiple lines of evidence and analyses including reviewing all available documentation; project application's, progress reports and the like, media reports, material made available from Big *hART* team members including arts workers and the creative producer, including blogs, Facebook communication, images and movies, media reports, and three field trips. Each of

these trips enable data to be collected at strategic times during the life of the project including one as the project was evolving and in its formative stages, then a second during phase one where Wynyard High was acting as a pilot for the subsequent phase. In this visit, young people themselves were interviewed, as well as arts workers, the creative producer, community members and project partners, as well as observing work in progress. In the third visit the evaluator attended the film festival, interviewed a cross section of participants, including young people and those adjunct to the project, observations on the community were able to be made, a focus group was held, the films were viewed, the views of audience members sought, and the evaluator acted as a participant-observer to Big *h*ART processes and outputs.

PROCESS EVALUATION

Overview of Project Aims: Intent and Achievements

Drawing from the application submitted to the National Binge Drinking Strategy Community Level Initiative and the Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation, the following summary reveals in brief the project aims and achievements (Table 1).

Project Aims

Aim	Achieved	Not-Achieved
Youth		
Influence the attitudes and behaviours of young people	√	
Promote positive peer messages about responsible alcohol consumption	√	
Empower young people to lead opinions concerning binge	√	

drinking		
Provide a platform for young people to share their experiences, concerns and ideas with the community	√	
Community		
Raise awareness of the issue	√	
Support young people to tackle the issue of binge drinking	√	
Support youth leadership	√	

What Table 1 reveals is that **SMASHED** met each of these project aims.

How was this achieved?

First, the lifecycle of the project to date evolved differently to what was initially foreseen. For example, rather than individuals creating films across each of the five sites initially identified, Hellyer Polytechnic, Wynyard High, Burnie High, Latrobe High, and Marist College (Burnie), students from Hellyer Polytechnic did not participate as timetable restrictions at the school and lack of staff resources precluded support needed for participation. Consequently, students from four schools—Wynyard High, Burnie High, Latrobe High, and Marist College (Burnie)—participated. Second, the initial action plan was to have seen students across each school conceiving, developing, and producing—under Big *hART*’s mentorship—separate films for each individual. Delays in signing the funding agreement meant project work was not able to commence until this was finalised. This meant that the

project was staged in the way that seven individual students at Wynyard High each made their own films during the end of 2010—this becoming phase one of the project—and students in groups of six or seven across the three other schools worked conjointly within each small group to make their own film conjointly; the resulting five films becoming phase two of the project. Marist College and Burnie High each had two teams of students. Each team produced one film. Latrobe High had one team who produced one film. This meant that the lessons learnt from phase one informed phase two, and the notion of being reflexive to context as it unfolded underscoring Big *hART*'s reputation for excellent practice (P. R Wright, 2009a, 2009b; P.R Wright & Palmer, 2007).

Second, partnerships have been a significant feature of the project. These partnerships have been both formal and informal. For example, both the Burnie/Wynyard Liquor Accord and the Cradle Coast Authority have provided both fora for the work and its development, as well as providing venues for filming, contacts into the community, made time available for interviews and background research, promoted the project in the community, as well as demonstrating interest through attending film shoots. Local Police also appeared in several films extending in-kind support. Schools have been flexible in accommodating workshops, timetabling, provided material support, extending various forms of good will, as well as having some staff who have literally played a part in the films themselves. Student filmmakers also involved friends, family and community in making available venues for filming, extras in shooting, as well as various forms of in-kind support.

Two parallel streams of development were also implemented in order to support student participants. First, opportunities were provided for issues discussion and

concept development in order to both visualise and then realise a vision for the films. Secondly, skills development workshops provided by Big *hART* team members were key. These workshops were provided individually, in pairs, and in small groups, and included camera, sound, lighting, and interview workshops, scriptwriting, storyboarding, and production planning workshops. This meant that Big *hART* both supported the exploration, development and evolution of ideas as well as developing in students the skills and techniques needed in order to make these a reality.

Big *hART* took project participants on a process starting with issue discussion, flowing through research, creative- and concept-development, iterative and incremental storyboard development, to film shoot, editing, then to the Festival, school screenings, and panel discussions. In the words of one arts worker: “they were pushed to think deeper”. The power of the project came from the opportunities provided for co-learning in a supportive environment that validates young people’s experience. It is these processes that built participant’s confidence and standing within the community thereby contributing to self-efficacy and self-respect.

Overview of Project Objectives

OUTCOME EVALUATION—The Results Chart

The Results Chart considers the key performance indicators in light of the evidence gathered against which the project was funded.

Objective	2010-2011 achievement statement in summary form	Evidence to support summary statement	Exceptions, issues or comment
A total of 4 teams of 4 young people engaged in the SMASHED workshops	Presentations were given across 5 high schools across the NW coast resulting in both 8 individuals and 4 groups of students volunteering to be involved.	39 young people across four schools were engaged in the SMASHED workshops. 7 individuals and 5 groups produced films	Five schools initially volunteered to be involved, but were reduced to four as time constraints precluded Hellyer Polytechnic from involvement.
Consistent engagement of 16 key young people in workshops	Key young people were consistently engaged in workshops.	Young people attended workshops during weekends and school holidays reflecting high levels of commitment. Young people developed skills in interviewing, lighting, filming, project planning, editing, and group work.	112 workshops were provided by Big <i>hART</i> team members. Time and situational constraints meant that individuals produced their own films in phase 1, while teams produced films as a group project in phase 2. Each of the film shoots for the 12 films averaged three days each in length.
Formation of strong cross community partnerships by the 4 teams with 39 young people in the community to produce a variety of short films exploring the implications of youth binge drinking	A variety of strong cross-community partnerships were formed.	12 short films were completed. Various disparate groups across the community provided support to the film makers including providing material support, venue access, appearing as actors, or being flexible with system-wide constraints in	168 people across these communities participated as talent, extras and crew. 250 people attended the film festival Students presented to Cradle Coast Authority and then

		<p>order to facilitate young people's processes.</p> <p>School staff both supported through the provision of specialised skills and acting in films.</p> <p>Local businesses provided props, advice and venues.</p> <p>A wide variety of themes were explored across the 12 films reflecting thought, passion, sensitivity and energy.</p>	<p>twice to the Burnie/Wynyard Liquor Accord as community partners</p> <p>Coast FM provided 'voice-overs' for one film.</p>
Ownership of the project by the participants	Young people acted as researchers and filmmakers where their perceptions, ideas and observations were realised in 12 short films.	<p>Film themes referenced young people's experiences, the communities in which they live, and both reflected and critiqued the profound influence of popular culture.</p> <p>One young person insisted that his idea became realised despite some practical considerations. With good will and perseverance this was ultimately achieved.</p>	Young people expressed concern when time pressures to complete meant that Big hART staff became more directive revealing high degrees of ownership.
Quality of short films submitted to the competition	The films shown at the Film Festival represented differences in resources available and the audience who watched.	<p>Many films reflected highly sophisticated development, and individual's aptitudes.</p> <p>School staff members expressed surprise at the quality of output given their experience with some individuals who created them.</p> <p>Project partners commented on the high standard realised by project participants.</p>	Phase one films were developed in different contexts and time frames to phase two. While the former benefited from a longer lead-time, individuals also felt the pressure of bearing sole responsibility. Phase two films, by way of contrast, were developed in small groups thereby benefiting from 'more hands' in both their

		<p>The judges in their feedback on the films highlighted how many of the films achieved a good balance between aesthetic concerns, “working as a film” and having a message but not being “didactic”.</p>	<p>creative development and filming. However, the time frame was much more constrained, and the group dynamics were more complex. There was a tension between the audience seeing the films in one sitting thereby viewing them as a ‘whole’, and individuals who focussed on individual output. This meant that there different ‘readings’ of the films individually and the festival as a whole.</p> <p>It is also the case that while form follows function, it is the form that audience come to first. This means that when the film does not work well as an aesthetic event the ‘message’ behind the film is lost.</p>
Project and short film competition receive local and national media attention	The project received wide local media exposure.	Five media stories in the local press. One Radio Interviews. A national media story is forthcoming	S-press, a free magazine distributed to over 3,000 schools, youth centres, local libraries and youth hot spots across metropolitan and regional Australia will feature a story on <i>SMASHED</i> in the September edition.
1000 students attend screening of the short film competition	The short film festival was held at the Metro Cinema in Burnie, with subsequent showings at each of the participating High Schools.	755 Year 9 and Year 10 students attended the ‘in-school’ screenings. In addition many young people attended the Film Festival Screening at Burnie Metro Cinema.	
Uptake of the DVD educational resource by groups in the community	Not yet.		The DVD is currently being duplicated for distribution.

			A number of schools and agencies have asked for copies of this resource as it becomes available.
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What the Results Chart reveals is that through **SMASHED** Big *h*ART has achieved the following:

- i. Developed advanced communication skills in project participants.
- ii. Developed understandings and revealed misconceptions about binge drinking.
- iii. Provided a challenging project for participants.
- iv. Empowered young people to engage with issues around them.
- v. Developed more open dialogue within and between communities around a significant social and health-related issue.
- vi. Provided opportunities for young people to ‘grow, strengthen, develop, and challenge’ beyond which school systems could normally provide.
- vii. Facilitated young people themselves becoming a ‘voice for change’.

There are a number of stories of change that encapsulate some significant project outcomes. The first one reflects a young man who ‘came out of himself’ during the project. Initially presenting as shy, lacking confidence, and with an inability to express himself, he became increasingly enthusiastic, self-determined, and committed himself with passion to video production, an area previously unknown. He has now self-identified as a filmmaker describing how this has

“broadened his horizons”, and presented potential future work opportunities (Fieldwork interview #12).

This story reflects both ‘pathways towards work’, and personal growth and development.

The second story highlights one young person who moved from a place of minimal project engagement, frequently being absent or forgetful, who progressively became more involved and attentive as the project progressed. This change was manifested in increasing levels of responsibility taken during the project to point where this person became a film ‘director’ managing and responding to unforeseen changes in scheduling or practical problems (Fieldwork interview #7).

This story reflects growing level of competency and confidence.

The third story reflects one young woman in the project who regularly volunteered for every new experience that became available, regularly over-committing both inside and outside the project. During the project this young woman identified feelings of being overwhelmed and made a decision to be less involved. This was a positive development for her in the way that she realised and then asserted her own limits and personal boundaries (Fieldwork interview #13).

This change, supported by the Big *hART* team, reveals increasing levels of self-regulation.

The fourth story describes how each of the four separate groups were brought together to share their films, ideas, and experiences. During this time some young people who had previously insisted they not speak in a public forum volunteered to speak, including one with a speech impediment speaking with clarity, confidence,

and pride. Young people listened to each other, demonstrated good will towards each other, and previous elements of competition between them dissipated with a sense of group identity developing (Fieldwork interview #15).

This story revealed the growing sense of community and bridge building between disparate groups, and young people acting as peer educators.

The fifth story involved one group of young woman filmmakers who described how viewing the Festival with extended family and friends raised debate about what was modelled within families with regard to binge drinking, what the incidence of binge drinking was, cultural norms, and what an appropriate definition of binge drinking actually was. In the words of one young person, “it was an argument we had never had” (Focus group #3); this being an example of the way that the project became a ‘conversation starter’.

What this story highlights is the generative effect of the project, and how young people can have a voice.

Finally, one workshop experience provided by the Big *h*ART team, focussed on creative responses to formulaic and stereotypical responses to critical incidents typically present in lazy media reporting. Students described feelings of freedom when released from these constraints and alternative forms of communal and companionship behaviours typical of what they usually associated with binge drinking (Focus group #2).

This story revealed the educative potential of the project through: broader understandings of how stories are sensationalised through media reporting,

young people's innate creative capacities, and an alternative understanding of euphoria.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

As a pilot project **SMASHED** was highly productive in terms of outputs and outcomes. These significant outcomes included those for young people, the arts workers who mentored them, the teachers in the schools where the projects were located, the project partners, and the community in which these young people live.

As a 'conversation starter' **SMASHED** was highly effective. While it is simply not possible to attribute causality to the project and behaviours associated with binge drinking in the future—the way that the project will impact on the degree and scope of binge drinking at unforeseeable future events, for example—the evidence strongly suggests the project participants link **identification** of binge drinking with an **awareness** of the impacts of binge drinking. This awareness of both what binge drinking is, and then potential impacts, is the first essential stage in any behavioural change. In other words, knowing what binge drinking is, what it may look like, and behaviours that may flow as a consequence are a clear project outcome; this value impact chain is linked by association, and in these contexts, causality is impossible to predict.

These outcomes, in and of themselves, are meaningful to participants, worthy of funding, and significant in the way that they are developed in a cost-effective way when compared to other 'educational strategies'. For example, simply running a 30 second TV advertisement on prime time TV can range from \$150,000 to \$500,000 depending on the segment popularity (www.adage.com). This figure also does not

take account of production costs, message repetition, or the difficulty of reaching this NET GEN ‘target audience’ who are more likely to believe their peers rather than adults as sources of information (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2011). However, **SMASHED** was much more than that.

SMASHED provided both a methodology and accessible contemporary tools to young people that enabled them to inquire into ‘themselves’ in a reflexive way that was beyond their usual processes. This was significant in the way that it develops social, cultural and personal agency (Cote & Levine, 2002; P R Wright, 2011), and lies in contrast to traditional ‘top down’ hierarchical, adult-centric, or paternalistic approaches. This means that, in the context of the project, that rather than others determining risk, prescribing knowledge, or acting on young people’s behaviours in order to resolve difficulties and misunderstandings, young people themselves—who are in a **unique** position to contribute to their own personal and community development—*helped each other* achieve wellbeing, learning, meaningful work, recreation, and hence contribute in richer ways to a fully functioning democratic society. As one project partner described: “[**SMASHED**] was a counter-counter solution, previously invisible to institutional players—policy makers, government and health—that gave this phenomenon a new voice **from inside it**”. These outcomes are entirely consistent with the way that Art can help you ‘lift your eyes up, and broaden your horizons’.

This approach directly addresses the National Binge Drinking Strategy goal of “young people taking greater responsibility for their own behaviour”. In addition, the project also produced socially beneficial outcomes by reducing young people’s feelings of isolation through creative and collaborative means—social exclusion

having been one important determinant reported to be linked with binge drinking (Weitzman & Kawachi, 2000). Bringing each school group of filmmakers together to view and discuss each other's work was a powerful example in this regard. As an interesting adjunct, participants reported times of feeling euphoric when filming that they identified as the same as when drinking. As one arts-worker noted, "they discovered that they didn't have to be pissed to have a good time".

In addition, in order to be filmmakers young people had to learn about film and think as filmmakers. In other words, these young people were provided with opportunities to behave, think, and perform as artists. This meant that they developed artistic behaviours that sustained their engagement, such as problem finding, innovation, play, representation, and collaboration. As such, these became hallmarks of the project and are powerful markers of success.

A project such as **SMASHED** provides an exemplar of what is possible when community, the arts and schools come together around issues of mutual concern. As an exemplar it can be understood as a way of 'winning the future through creative schools' (Dwyer, 2011), where creativity and innovation have been identified as being key to transforming education and preparing young people for 'uncertain times' in the times of social dislocation, exclusion, increasing health risk, and the knowledge and innovation economies (Haseman & Jaaniste, 2008). The 'openness' of such a project, captured in the words of one arts worker in a student workshop, "it doesn't have to be anti-binge drinking", also provided a tension. There are always concerns, for example, about balancing process and product, depth and breadth, and participation and excellence.

With regards to the limitations of the project, students, arts workers, and others associated with the project consistently reported unrealised potential, or unproductive tensions as a consequence of limited time available. These time pressures were also a consequence of the limited funds available and the project's ambitious scope. Within these significant constraints remarkable outcomes were achieved.

In short, **SMASHED** reveals success in developing pathways for sharing and knowing that are rich in potential for supporting personal, social, and ultimately institutional change. In the words of one project partner, "bridges were built between groups old and young, young and young, and between knowledge and action".

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