

It's Like Thinking With Both Sides Of Your Brain. Big Hart's LUCKY Project: An Imaginative Intervention



Peter Wright



It's Like Thinking With Both Sides Of Your Brain. Big Hart's LUCKY Project: An Imaginative Intervention

Peter Wright

Murdoch University

2009

Copyright 2009 © Big hART

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would particularly like to acknowledge and thank the young people, project partners, project workers and those who have been so willing to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences within this many layered project. I also acknowledge those indirectly involved with LUCKY and its individual components over the last three years who agreed to participate in focus groups or individual interviews in order to explore and better understand issues surrounding the social impact of the arts; each participant in this process has added meaning.

Thank you.

Peter Wright

Murdoch University

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Introduction	1
The Marine Shed	3
Big hART Processes	6
Giving Responsibility	10
The Power of Play	13
Big hART and Enhanced Opportunities	17
An Amazing Learning Curve	20
Towards the world of work	23
Finding a place through giving and receiving	25
Lifting understanding	28
LUCKY Builds Connections	29
The SK8rs	32
LUCKY Productively Engages Young People	36
Levels of participation	40
Big hART invites generative arts participation	41
Adding value through arts-based methodologies	42
Suggestions for Future Practice	44
Summary Comments	45
References	47
Appendix: Funding and support	48

Introduction

This document represents an inquiry into Big hART's LUCKY project run primarily in the North West of Tasmania. It contains a series of portraits, and thick descriptions of contexts and individuals involved in various ways with the project. There are observations of processes and products, each revealing ways in which the work of Big hART impacts on individuals and the communities around them.

It is an outcome of a series of visits to various project components from July 2005 (*Radio Holiday*), to 2008. It includes descriptions, observations, inquiry into and reflections on such LUCKY project components as *Radio Holiday* and *Drive In Holiday*, *This is Living*, and *Drive* as a work in progress. There also some insights presented that have been gleaned from adjunct projects such as the *No Comply* skate event held in Burnie during 2005. It includes and gives voice to project participants such as young people from locations including Burnie, Wynyard, Smithton and surrounding areas; older project participants such as those resident in Smithton Nursing Home, the site of one project component; project partners such as those either directly or indirectly involved in support of project participants—both youth and elders; and those who functioned to provide advice and support from local councils, youth support workers, and government agencies.

This document is not an audit style report where objectives are measured against outcomes. In this sense it presents a 'knowing how' rather than a 'knowing that'. What this means is that is the personal knowledge of, and knowledge about project participants can contribute to understanding LUCKY in terms of knowing how, when, why, whether, and for whom such projects work. Its power lies in the way it is

grounded in the interactions of project participants with Big hART and those involved in this work. Consequently, as the project work is reflective of, and grounded in the lives, times, and communities that surround project participants, it can reveal what is *usable* and *useful*. Simply put, what this document reveals is the knowledge that is produced through use, that is, what is learnt through doing.

The document includes a series of portraits or narratives. It reflects knowledge of project participants both as groups and as individuals, and portraits of particular individuals who can be seen as representative of themes or patterns of project impact broadly speaking. As these studies are presented in a narrative form they are accessible, and act as agents of understanding, revealing what works in practice. These narratives are informed by multiple lines of evidence including: focus groups, interviews, observations, review of artefacts, and commentary provided by a range of informants including young people, support workers, team members, project directors, and those with a concern and/or involvement with the project. Taken together, these constitute a body of experience that provide evidence against which the impact of LUCKY can be judged.

In this document, a context is first set that evokes much of Big hART's work. Next Big hART's processes are described. These include themes and principles that run through the project and provide its distinct characteristics. Following this a range of outcomes including enhanced opportunities for *learning*, *connection*, *work* and *understanding* are illuminated. Finally, observations are made revealing how and in what ways LUCKY is successful with some recommendations for future practice.

The Marine Shed

The marine shed is one long low building that has seen better days. The windows are dirty, the paint blistered and in disrepair. It is very cold for long parts of the year. The building slopes down the road from the Bass Highway, the major transport artery that runs across North West Tasmania, down to the port.

If you stand on the top of the steps to the front door you see across to the rail line that services the docks. A conveyer belt rises from the docks and feeds into a funnel that rattles as it spits out wood chips into stockpiles ready for export to Japan. Heavy yellow diesel engines dirty from work that reflect Burnie's industrial heritage rumble as they shunt minerals out, and move heavy freight around; they are not as busy as they used to be. If you look down past the bottom of the building you can sometimes see rabbiters who take ferrets under the bridge where the highway crosses the river. Both of these changes in levels of activity reflect changing times.

The marine shed is no longer associated with port business, it has become the Creative Living Centre (CLC). And while the roof leaks and the wind whistles through the building when it blows, it now is used by Big hART as an office and a workshop space for project participants to meet.

On the port side of the building where the ground falls away there is an old garage. It was here that a skate ramp was built and lots of young skaters would come for a skate 'sesh' and hang out. There are tags¹ around the wall. Besides the benefits of the half-pipe (ramp) to the skaters, the shed cuts out the wind making

¹ A graffiti writer's tag is his/her personalised stylised signature.

more difficult tricks less arduous. This is where a Big hART project worker, also a skater, met a number of young skaters who subsequently became involved in *This is Living*, then *Drive*.

The CLC provides a place to 'be'. Here LUCKY project worker, Chris Mead, meets and works with young mums and kids under five to produce a zine², engage in jewellery making, develop early learning opportunities for parents and children alike, and provide support. It is also at the CLC where LUCKY participants have learnt how to blog. This blog can take the form of an online diary, a description of events, or personal or social commentary. The LUCKY blog connects socially isolated young mums to more than each other; it also provides them with a platform beyond the confines of their small community. As one young mum Amy commented: "instead of getting our message out to the local community, we can go to the world." In this sense, social connectedness can take a variety of forms and is not limited by geography.

Two young mums talked about their experience of coming to the shed and how their project involvement grew out of this. Simone, for example, shared how she first became involved: "I came down because me friend was involved and I just hung out with her." Another came because of what the opportunity presented.

I joined up because it was for young mums and it was a free project and it was LUCKY and it was to do with photography. So I thought that would be a great experience to learn photography so I was all for it. Especially to have something that involves the kids as well, you never get that.

² A zine is a small circulation non-commercial publication.

They both could immediately see the benefits. Beth, for example, described how it became an “outlet for young mums and kids to be able to get out to be able to talk to each other, and get out of the house where you tend to get stuck when you’re a mother.” There were benefits for both her and her daughter with both of them growing in confidence. She noted:

I’ve noticed in just dealing with other people, and talking with other people, I didn’t have great skills beforehand; I didn’t get out and about very often. And Jaydah [her daughter], she used to hang off me and wouldn’t leave me side, now I can take her out and she play like she is today. So it is good for her and good for me as well. It changes for the kids as well, gets them involved in the community activities

These benefits are a consequence of being part of group who meet regularly at the CLC.

Simone shared how her confidence grew because of “Its of being in a big group, and there is support in the group behind you, you have that as back up.” Now 22, Simone has been involved with two different LUCKY components, *Radio/Drive In Holiday* and *This is Living*, and is now a mentor for some 18-year-old mums. Her words reveal a growth in social skills: “A lot of young mums want to give up, because it is extra pressure, so you help encourage them through.” She particularly learnt to, “not judge a book by its cover, accept people and learn how to talk to them first, and this is from meeting with this group.”

Beth, on the other hand, emphasised her own personal learning. “I learnt how to be a lot more happier with who I am in, learnt to accept myself by being around a lot of different personalities and stuff. I just got more comfortable with who I am, through being involved with group activity.” Big hART then employs this social dynamic in a purposeful way, building connections and strengthening the social

skills associated with it. Both Simone and Beth, as single socially isolated young mums highlight: “You feel like you’re not alone, there is always someone you can call on.” And, “just being involved with in a community and feeling part of a group, feels great, like a high.”

Finally, when describing the process of creating the zine at the CLC, Beth described how this new sense of self-belief has allowed her “to be more outspoken, lift my voice for ideas and stuff. I got some recognition for me as a person.” Big hART, has in short, developed the shed as a site *with potential*, where a new sense of sense can be constructed, strengthened, and projected into the wider community with powerful contingent benefits.

Big hART Processes

One theme that runs consistently through LUCKY is a focus on story. This focus is both a dynamic and essential part of Big hART processes. This is particularly seen through the practices of generating, shaping and editing participant’s stories into original work. For example, in *Radio Holiday/Drive in Holiday* young people collected stories from shack communities around the coast of Tasmania. These stories were then used as the basis for radio plays developed and performed for *Ten days on the Island* Festivals, the show touring statewide, and then Federation Square as part of the Melbourne International Arts Festival. In *This is Living*, the stories of older Tasmanians were collected by project participants for the performance in Burnie Civic Theatre. In *Drive*, the stories and experiences of young Tasmanian men were used as the basis for the film.

This dynamic is further strengthened by building a language of performance around this original work that reflects the strengths, abilities and identities of project participants. What this reflects is the devised nature of Big hART's work that honours and strengthens participant's creative capacities and harnesses these through engagement with arts practice. One outcome of this processual form is the collective responsibility participants feel for the overall product generating commitment, pride, ownership, and responsibility.

A second element is the way that these processes induct participants so that they become cultural producers, rather than merely cultural consumers. This means that they can become critical and more purposeful in the way that they live their lives.

While this practice has a genealogy that draws on a range of forms of cultural production, it is a contemporary art form that is transdisciplinary in nature with no one aesthetic or ideological objective. Consequently, the artefacts produced as a consequence of this work are multi-layered, open and fertile with meaning as they are enriched through dialogue and the cross fertilisation that occurs between arts practice, arts practitioners, a range of cultural fields and project participants. What this means is that there is an enhanced scope for altering perceptions. For example, in *Drive* young men are engaged in making a film of the experience of cars, power, and auto-cide; when this 'everyday' life is performed as art, social critique and radical questioning is prompted. As one observer to this process stated: "it kind of makes you think doesn't it. I mean, how come this seems to be ok... that young

men have few resources and those they do have can be so destructive?” It is these notions that set Big hART’s work apart from conventional forms of arts practice.

What Big hART’s practices do is to educate, challenge or inspire audiences in particular ways. Cohen-Cruz (2002: 95) suggested that for this to happen there needs to be a confluence of factors: “people already engaged or engageable with specific issues, aesthetic strategies that are compelling to desired audiences, strong support, and synchronicity with the energy of the times.” These factors can be seen to come together through each element of LUCKY; for example, the changing nature of land use, the aging population, social isolation and young men living in challenging times. Linking each of these factors are the experiences of young people feeling disenfranchised and on the margins where they are perceived to be burden on society rather than contributing to it.

It is this combination of factors that have led Big hART to devise new aesthetic strategies as ways to engage audiences. This revision, reinvention, adaptation, appropriation and change embedded in these strategies has led to process of cultural renewal. This notion is not new, Brecht (1974: 51) for example, notes how “new problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes: in order to represent it, modes of representation must change.” LUCKY, then in each of its different components seeks to convey the cultural experiences and social issues of participants to the audience in a clear, accessible way; in this case through the media of radio plays, live performance, photography exhibitions, the *Scream* zine, and film.

A legacy of these processes is a reaffirmation of the reciprocal relationship between art and life, and between asking questions and providing answers. For example, some of the features of the work challenge traditional distinctions between what occurs in everyday life and what is 'performed', what is real and what is fiction, and between imagination and authenticity. What this does is draw attention to how everyday acts contribute to the construction of personal identity, and recognise that "the imagination is integral to the narrative of self-hood" (Cohen-Cruz 2005: 56). Cohen-Cruz goes on to describe how a sense of belonging is built on identification with the narratives of others. Ricoeur (1992) also notes the way that narrative can act as a place to try out new possibilities and models for living.

What we see repeatedly in Big hART's work is the way that sharing a story conjoins participants, actors and audience through performative means acting as a bridge between them creating a bond. In *Drive*, for example, we bear witness to stories of young men and their rites of passage drawing us into relationship with them; the process of making public what might usually be considered private heightening the emotional impact. Witnessing, whether it is the social isolation of older Australians, or the grief of a bereaved family, implies a different level of engagement for an audience. In this sense, the work is profoundly educative in the way that we are invited to discover the capacity to respond in ourselves. As trauma scholars highlight, trauma can be can be overwhelming, yet through the narration of personal story, an individual may make sense of it within their own psyche (Douglass & Vogler, 2003).

Broadly speaking, what we see in Big hART's work is that the narratives of community and selfhood are not closed or self-sufficient social units but flexible and dynamic social practices. More importantly, they are produced and reproduced through interaction with others. It is this imaginative and creative process that provides opportunities for participants to enter into different communities through dialogue and with reciprocity.

This processual and performative work draws on the work of Freire (2002) and Boal (1993) where members of the community are encouraged to reflect on their experiences as individuals and to use their ideas to imagine new ways of being and develop new forms of social action. For individuals, this means that creative process of giving form to feeling is an 'act of knowing' where participants re-order, reshape and re-evaluate the stories and knowledge they already possess to gain insights into their own situation.

In short, Big hART uses cultural strategies that encourages participants to reflect on their own experiences by finding connections with others, and potentially (re)construct new identities and revitalise communities. One significant way this occurs is through giving responsibility.

Giving Responsibility

One of the features of Big hART's work is the process of developing responsibility in the young people they work with. This occurs in part in the collective way that the work develops and the feeling of ownership participants develop for what is generated. For example, one mentor shared his observations of *Radio/Drive In Holiday*:

You know some of the kids weren't crazy, but highly strung and had gone off the rails at some point of time, but over three years—[I have seen] lots of changes [in them]. Of some of them still involved, they're responsible, some of them have got licences now. One of them actually tows caravans around for distributors. On the first trip he was a highly-strung, hard to get along with young bloke. And in the last year he has been working. You could see how Scott [Rankin, Artistic Director] had imparted that to high profile actors, like Kerry Armstrong and Lex Marinos. When you knew [the young person's story], it drew you in and you were a bit more likely to [be] a bit more tolerant, give them a bit more time, and sort of help them a bit. A lot of them have grown. It is the only time some of them have ever been given some responsibility. We gave them responsibility and they rose to it.

A different project worker, not used to working with young people also described how he then felt the same:

It is the same with me. I suppose I could have said, 'bugger it I can't be bothered with this anymore', when it got a bit stressful. But then I let the rest of them down. A lot of [these young people], when given the responsibility, have a chance they haven't had before. If they don't do their part of the job, you know, getting the script ready or whatever for their bit in the play... and you can't force people to do it.

This worker then shared how he saw young people grow as a result.

What I see is that you give them responsibility, give them a job like interviewing other people, etc etc, and from what I've seen is they've all done it. And as proud as buggery when it comes to the Play, or handing out tickets at the door of *Drive In Holiday*; the proudest I've ever seen them. I don't think that they'd have the opportunity otherwise.

What this reveals is that young people are often underestimated for the potential they have. Importantly, as these two participant/observers noted, young people often rise to the occasion when given the opportunity. This process can also set a dynamic of mutual interdependence that appears to be in contrast to what might be expected in other spheres. One mentor to the project shared some of his experiences in this regard.

If you look at any [of these types] of arts projects... these things are often fraught with peacocks, and people with mental health problems, alcohol problems or drug problems and they all come together to do this one thing. And they all have to support each other in order to get

through, whereas in business, you weed them out, you don't tend to support them to get to the other side. Whereas in a theatrical production, you get halfway through that and someone's life falls apart. You can't get to the end of that production unless you help that person get to the end. There is an interdependence there. People have to wrap themselves around that.

A different mentor described how he saw this explicitly in *Drive In Holiday*.

We saw one young girl get herself into the state that she got herself into over something personal. In a normal workplace she would be considered a pain in the arse and best got rid of. I watched [the actor] Kerry Armstrong moving around, she is a high profile example. If she walked past that girl anywhere she would stop and give her a bit of a hug. And it was all part of the process. And other people were aware that she was having a bit of a struggle. They were saying ok we'll get you through this, and you wouldn't see that in a normal workplace.

This form of conjoint responsibility, each for the other, is developed from a group that was unexpected. One project worker, for example, described his first impressions.

Often when you see these young people the first impressions are often negative. Could be their dress, could be their behaviour, you wonder what you could see [positive] in them? Studs in their face, and you look at all that, then when you get involved with them [and] all of that dissolves into insignificance. You don't see the ugly things and some of them start to shine after a while, [they] really get quite good at what they are trained to do.

One aspect of the work that helps develop these feelings of responsibility is the way that high profile actors and artists are drawn in as mentors, role models, and contributors to the artistic process. This has two effects, first instilling in young people that their work is significant enough for these high profile well established artists to be involved with and contribute to, and second, to reveal to these young people that these prominent artists also have ordinary concerns, and are willing to associate with them. The work, at its best, is democratic and a great leveller. One project worker described it this way.

And [this work] can be a great leveller, each person does their job. Even the stars, it creates responsibility. You try and mount a project with a

group of young people [of this demographic] and try and get to the end of it, it is not so nearly as powerful as drawing in a well-known person. So they know if I f**k this up, I f**k it up for other people as well.

Another worker agreed.

The more you mix it up with adults, and other highly skilled people, they rise to it. What you find is that a lot of young people come to that realisation and rise to the occasion, they realise this is serious, they tend not to go into that destructive mode, it is a more positive mode [of being]. This is a real show, with real money and it demands respect.

This leads to important realisations and strong impressions for the young people involved. A mentor across the projects described it this way.

The kids discover something that I don't think they know; they sort of discover that these [high profile] people are ordinary. They have the same problems as we do. I think that it sends a big message to these young people. They carry a memory that is pretty important, that they were acceptable as friends to these people as well.

These impressions can be deep seated with many associated benefits. As one observer to a range of Big hART projects noted:

The thing that strikes me is that anyone who ever gets involved in a Big hART project never forgets it. And you can often tell what stays in their mind is it is a very positive experience. And to me, what is most telling is that these are often the people who are first to come out to help in the next [project], they're looking for a chance to help.

Finally, these memories, and the responsibility it engenders comes as a consequence of engagement, deepening commitment and hard work, all values and dispositions valued in the world of work. As one mentor added: "A lot of them have put a bloody lot of work into it. Far more than many people realise."

The Power of Play

A second powerful dynamic that emerges from Big hART's work and is core to their processes is the power of play. For example, in *Radio/Drive In Holiday* young single mums were intentionally taught how to play; this ability being specifically developed in relation to playing with their young children. While this might seem

natural and available to people generally speaking, this is not always the case.

Young single mums in difficult circumstances, for example, might not have necessarily had these experiences themselves, have the resources, and so feel less confident to initiate, provide opportunities for and promote these investigative and developmental experiences for their own children.

It is well understood in education and psychology that play experiences are important because play is where bonding occurs, where body brain connections are made, and where the imagination is developed. Importantly, as a consequence of this intention, there were benefits both for the mums and children themselves.

Two young single mums, Jemma (19, with two young children), and Marina (18, with a two year toddler) talked about their experiences with this aspect of LUCKY.

Jemma, for example, described how her partner had to travel away to find work, and she was left isolated with one small child and a brand new baby. In her words:

My [then] partner got work away and I got lonely and post-natal depression, and then [I was introduced to] Big hART. I started to meet new people. I could talk to them [Big hART], really openly and honestly, and tell them my problems, and then me and my partner separated and they were a really big help with that and really supported me. They started doing LUCKY down here, and we started doing toy making and doing fun games and we would keep an eye on each others [children]. We weren't doing much and then we got involved very quickly and we were like going every week. They treated us like equals and looked past all that other 'stuff' [that everyone notices].

Jemma went on to say: "Like even though I had kids I didn't know what play was. Now I know how to get down on their level and that". The value for Jemma was significant for in teaching her how to play:

...it built relationships with my daughter and with my nephew because now I can sit down with them and not feel like an idiot for playing with them—like [my daughter] is at a stage now where all she wants to do is play. It's just amazing.

Marina also described having similar experiences: “Now I’ve grown a lot since Big hART and I’ve become more independent with the help of the [Big hART] crew, and [from the experience] I’ve got something that I can pass on to my sister, and then maybe she can pass it on too”. What this meant is that resources were not only developed in these young women, but potentially transferred to those around them.

Big hART provided a range of opportunities for these women. One was simply making provision for them to travel to Burnie for workshops 88 kilometres away: “We can go to Burnie and see any of [the team], and it’s really good [in the way that connections are built outside of Smithton] and they give you hugs and cuddles and that”. As a mentor noted: “It is difficult to get ‘out’ of the community both psychologically and physically”. As one mum noted: “In Smithton ‘there is nothing there’ you seem to get lost and there is nothing to focus on”. What Big hART did through providing a range of cultural learning opportunities was “really give us something to pour our energy into”. Conjointly, a mentor working with the women noted it also “was relationship building and built connections with young women in Smithton rather than [them] having to go to Burnie.”

A second opportunity was performing at Federation Square for the Melbourne International Arts Festival. Jemma recounted the self-respect and confidence she developed as a result: “And I spoke [publicly] at the show—I finally got picked for something and they made me feel important”. Another young woman agreed: “Melbourne was the highlight, there was lots of pressure, lots of children, we thought that we’d lost a child, and the way that we handled it as a group, we all

pulled together was great”. Being recognised for achieving something worthwhile was a powerful experience for these young mums. In their words:

You could tell from the people’s faces [at the performance] that they did enjoy it and they did get something out of it. It is something that we can do now because of Big hART; we don’t have to stand back all of the time.

One mentor with them at that performance recalled: “The performance was unbelievable and people in the audience said ‘how did they do that?’ ... The feedback from the audience was amazing, like ‘oh my goodness how did these young people pull this together?’” Another young mum added: “And it was hard work, and see it all come together, I was like really proud of myself”.

This experience had a range of powerful consequences. A mentor travelling with them to Melbourne noted: “[These] young people worked hard and developed ownership of what they created, and its like a family, and they have ownership of the new roles they are developing and have learnt to give it priority”. She further recounted:

[T]he best part about it is to see the growth in them, not all the young people, some do come in and drift out and then come back in, and some stick with it. However, I think that they’ve all grown, kind of thing—and in particular in this particular community, its developed into a real powerful thing in that they’ve all gone on to do something like these guys are doing, like community services work, and they are now like their own family.

Jemma, for example, described how:

I usen’t be able to interact with people without them thinking that I was an idiot, I’ve opened up a lot and say what I think without worrying that they’d think I was stupid. Now I know that the only stupid question is the one that you don’t ask... And now I’ll say ‘I don’t know what you mean’—it really gave me a lot more confidence, and I want to learn more now. I’ve only been a mum, we’ve never owned a house or a car and that, but I’ve been wealthy in other ways like having time to spend with my kids. Now Big hART has helped me get a community care certificate. And hey I’ve got a job now, I’ve got a job!

Finally, there are challenges associated with the project coming to an end. One young mum described it this way: “you grow something beautiful, and we had this beautiful thing in our lives, then funding ends, you come to the end of it, and then it dies. I’d give anything to have it back”. Of the 28 young people initially recruited into this project component, 19 stayed involved. None of these young women who had been involved with the justice system have re-offended since their involvement [with Big hART].

Big hART and Enhanced Opportunities

One way that Big hART’s work can be understood is in the way that it provides enhanced opportunities. The impact of this provision is revealed from a number of different perspectives. First, through an allied project worker and local skater. Second, through the stories of some young single mums. Third, the work and involvement of a young man with a disability. Fourth, through the eyes of a project worker who supported participants and received community feedback on them.

Big hART provides enhanced opportunities for those who come into the project on a variety of levels. These opportunities for growth are exemplified by both a community worker who came into the project through mutual association with a project worker, and a local skater who became part of the *SK8 JAM* events. This skater became instrumental in organising the event/festival and in helping to procure a permanent skate park in Burnie. A youth culture website described the event as follows:

The No Comply event in Burnie was not only a skateboard exhibition, it was a massive showcase of popular youth culture. It was unusual for an event like this to happen in Burnie, and this particular event did not happen without a very specific agenda.

Motivation behind Burnie No Comply

Burnie is subject to some frightening statistics including some of the highest rates of youth suicide in Australia. Coincidentally it also has extremely high rates of drug abuse, car accidents involving young people, teen pregnancies, vandalism and violence. These types of behavior and activities are usually associated with how young people will spend their 'free time' when they're not at work or in school.

How young people choose to use their 'free time' will be determined by the options available to them. The primary objective of the Burnie No Comply event is to demonstrate how the skateboarding culture - and other popular youth cultures alike, graffiti and music, can provide a mechanism to captivate the interests of young people, engage young people in their community and provide a positive influence on their development (<http://www.niceproduce.com.au/events.php?id=3>)

Briony, a community worker in the 'welfare' sector describes how the event started 3 years ago. In her words:

I was able to help [the big hART project worker] with some of his work—he could use some of my skills as needed, a funding application for example, and he was able to help me with mine [through his contact with skaters]. From one tiny little thing this has grown and I came on board [Big hART] as often as possible. [My involvement] has been more of youth worker/facilitator rather than as an artist. So it has been a very collaborative effort.

Joe, the skater, described how: “it basically started off with us just skating. And then there was a hip-hop festival, the SK8 JAM pilot called *No Comply*³. And I was involved in the community consultation, and putting on a competition, the New Year’s Eve event, and talking with skaters.” Joe, as a result of his involvement with *No Comply* and Big hART is now mentoring younger skaters.

Briony talked about her growth through her involvement with the project.

It showed me another way of doing things, and another way of working. It wasn’t just welfare based it was arts-based. It was completely different and yet there was some similarities. So all the time

³ The *No Comply* Hip Hop Festival was held at the Burnie Skate Park and old Marine Board Building. The event was underlined by the *No Comply* National skateboard art exhibition; a showcase of 100 individual skateboard designs produced by 30 of Australia’s most influential artists, designers and illustrators.

I was making a comparative analysis... These guys are lots more productive and more realistic with their time lines.

Briony went on to say how it was another way of thinking and working.

That's on the material basis, but on the other it is the level of thinking that changes. You go from a literal way of thinking to a lateral way of thinking. I remember trying to walk between both groups [welfare and Big hART] and it was pretty bloody impossible—between those material and immaterial worlds. [Working with Big hART] is like thinking with both sides of your brain. So what I am seeing is more achievable through [Big hART] and the needs that I am trying to meet through welfare can be met through Community Arts, and more accessibly, and in a more resourceful way. So it isn't wasting money and it isn't wasting time. So on the professional side there been a lot of growth there.

Briony was able to share a number of observations about young people involved:

And what I am seeing in Big hART is young people, in their own time, not being paid for, not being asked, not being forced, not being given all of these little freebies or incentives to come along to a meeting; they are coming along because they know that something is going to get done. They know they can own it, they know they can grow with it, and that's what makes it real.

Powerfully she recounts:

And at the same time [with Big hART] lots of young people have become empowered because they have actually been part of the project, dedicated THEIR own time, THEIR social lives, THEIR time, because it going on with something they wanted anyway.

Joe, a skater, described his experience this way:

I got more of an inside view of the council and the way that works and that through planning for the skate park. I learnt about planning for events, and that, and that was pretty interesting. At the end of the day it was kicking back and watching why we were here [skating], seeing what we did [planning and organising] and then seeing the outcome.

In reflecting on what Big hART has achieved through the projects, one community member remarked:

What Big hART has managed to do in the last few years is massive. The projects just grows and gathers momentum, and people get on board. It is the underground nature of it [rather than being top down], and young people coming and saying 'Hey, this is what we want' and we don't do it [in community], so it has a local person [project worker] and it took a NGO to do that. And its all come together and you have all of the different people coming together for the same purpose, and this is the most amount of community spirit I've ever seen in this town.

What is consistently observable is that growth or changes occur in young people through their participation. One community member noted the way that: “People stick together, and through this [project] they get to know other people. They get together with other people who they normally would never meet. And you could never commercialise it, because young people are attracted to the underground.”

Briony made her own observations in terms of impact on young people.

[Big hART] are doing it in a different way. There is more than one way to skin a cat... And I think it is a cultural awareness that is coming out of this. Like people didn't realise there was actually a culture here, like what was here was very drab, very industrial, lots of unemployment. Where as young people start to say now maybe this is a town of opportunity, we can make our own skate park. Hey we can get our own skate crew, we can get all of the musos together and have a jam and record an album. And it gives people the confidence to say, hey I can do this too! And maybe we don't have to go somewhere else, and if we bring other people in from the mainland it is to teach us here what we don't know already. And what we are starting to see is that there is another way of doing things than what has been happening for the last 20 years.

Big hART provides enhanced opportunities, so people can say I have the talent and I will [be creative] or I don't but I will learn how.

There are a number of young people whose experiences with Big hART are emblematic. The following section highlights both the diversity of these experiences and what they also share in common.

An Amazing Learning Curve

Hayley is a single mum who has been involved with LUCKY through *Radio Holiday/Drive In Holiday*, and then with *This is Living*. As she reflects on her personal learning through these projects with their challenges, frustrations and joys, she observes that with hindsight, it has been “an amazing learning curve.”

As Hayley thinks back on the last two years, she recalls beginning nervously through one of the photography workshops.

There was this guy doing photography, and they had workshops on to try and attract mothers into the group. And I met some really nice people and stuff, and it kept going from there. And I got sort of stuck into it myself, and it gave me something different to do, and my kids someone to play with, and it was a different environment [than what was I was used to].

What facilitated Hayley's involvement was acceptance by Big hART team members.

She noted how: "The people were very friendly, and understanding and you can talk to them about anything." It was through these initial workshops that Hayley came to see opportunities that normally would not be available to her. In her words:

And they gave me opportunities, like when it first started it [the workshop] was on photography. So it was on how to use a camera and how to get the best effect out of your pictures. So I thought oh, that's a good idea, so I went to that.

From this small beginning, other opportunities for learning occurred and these had a powerful effect on developing her self-confidence. Hayley recalled how she:

[W]ent to the Melbourne International Arts Festival [MIAF] and we done our production there. And I went to the shack communities, and see these small cultures, and I got to meet new people. And [at the MIAF] I got to interact with people, like on a different level, to be a host [to visitors] and show them around⁴, It was really good and like on a different level. And lots of people said I was good. It opened up a lot of opportunities, a lot of learning curves and it built a lot of self-confidence. There was a lot of things, like, I never thought I'd be able to do.

Some of this growth in self-confidence came from Hayley learning new skills, and experimenting with different roles—both literal and metaphoric. For example, as part of the filming for *Ten days on the Island* [Arts festival] and *Drive In Holiday*⁵, Hayley worked variously as a runner, a first assistant director, recording sound, and

⁴ As part of the event caravans were set up as installations 'housing' the art works, stories and images of the individual shack communities. Hayley acted as a host and tour guide to some of these installations and became an ambassador for the State. In Hayley's words: "it encouraged a lot of people to come."

⁵ As part of this project five short films were shot and produced for *Ten Days on the Island*.

then shared this new knowledge with others. She described the experience this way.

And I was doing 1st assistant director and that was a pretty big role, I learnt to break down the script, I learnt how to write shot lists, I learnt so much stuff, like sound, and I never thought I could do something like that and be able to keep me head on. Then I actually got to show others how to do it. And I learnt that if you actually give it a go, and you say well I actually have to do it, then you can do it, and you can achieve anything really.

Many of these new experiences were challenging for Hayley. On some occasions her feelings threatened to overwhelm her. She recalled:

After we finished the shooting of it, we held a production meeting, and I got thrown in the deep end. Like Hayley can do this, and Hayley's gunner do that and I felt like running away [laugh] but I done it. Like I was a bit a nervous, and I don't know what I'm doing, but they said no you can do it, calm down, and I done it.

Hayley also described how her communication skills developed. For example, as she worked on *This is Living* she developed interview skills and an ability to talk in front of others.

And then we done Seniors Week, we went around and interviewed the elderly and we learnt interviewing techniques, and we learnt how to communicate with people on different levels. People thought that was really good for me because I'm a poor listener and I talk over people. And they were a bit nervous with me doing the interviews. They thought I'd keep butting in and tell my story instead of getting them to tell their story. But they said that they were proud of me with what I done. And I got thrown in the deep end once again and was asked to be on a discussion panel [of young people] with Parliamentarians. And I got so many compliments from people in the crowd and from our political people.

One feature of Hayley's learning, as she describes it, had positive consequences in the way that she was then able to provide leadership for other project participants. She described it this way:

And it really built my self confidence, and I know that you don't get money from it, and you don't get this or that, but even the exercises, you know where we all stand in a circle and do group exercises. People like were going I don't want to do this, and I got up and said 'like it

doesn't matter if you don't want to do this it is a team thing, we've all got to work together. It can't be done by one person'. I said, 'it's got to be done as a group'.

You know, the things you learn... like inside yourself, and know in yourself you've got more strength. You've got more self-control; you've got more team working skills. It really helps with that sort of stuff.

These benefits have then carried forward into other aspects of her life. Hayley's friends, for example, have noticed the changes.

My friends are realising that I want to turn my life around. Like I might have had these thoughts in my head about going back to school, but it was always like 'one day'. My friends now realise that I want to make something of my life. Now I look at and I go I can do all that and I'm going to. Like before I was going I don't know if I can do that.

Hayley described how these benefits and this personal growth didn't come without lots of sacrifices, effort and challenges. For example:

Mentally it was difficult, making myself believe I can do it. Like in Hobart during the film shoot we were all tired and all on edge and we knew we had to get it done. And we had to get everything ready for the show. I just broke down and I wanted to go home, it was full on all day everyday, the children were being babysat at the apartments. It was mentally draining, physically draining. We couldn't have smoke breaks, but at the same time at the end of the day we all got to share. We got everyone in a circle and we all took turns, and we all got to say how everyone felt. And it gave us some options to look at it different without getting angry and without losing friends—without them going off. It was really good like that.

Finally, Hayley is now able to make links between the opportunities that have been presented, the learning that has occurred, and benefits obtained. In her words:

I know it's tiring, it's exhausting, it's mentally draining but in the end it's all worth it. To see what you've done, the work that you've done, have it there in front of you. For other people to watch it and enjoy it, it's not just something you've achieved, it's given something for other people to work on [as well]. It's all worth it. It's [been] an amazing learning curve.

Towards the world of work

Janean is a young single mum who initially became involved with the *Radio/Drive In Holiday* component of LUCKY. These experiences led her towards the world of

work. She has a young daughter with Cystic Fibrosis⁶. Janean became involved with the project through a friend, and in her words: “It gave me something different to do [than being a full time carer], and a reason to go out”. Her social network then grew and “I started to learn heaps of new stuff.” One of those things was photography.

Learning photography in a supportive atmosphere opened up new worlds. “I learnt how to do long shots, and short shots, they [Big hART] allowed you to experiment, and help you out if you have problems.” This opened up new worlds for Janean for who is now working part time in a camera shop, balancing this with the demanding care for her daughter, and aspiring to be a professional photographer. She describes how if it wasn’t for the opportunity Big hART provided, and the mentoring she received from a professional photographer associated with the project, “I just never would have thought of this as possible for me.”

A number of aspects characterise Janean’s story. First, opportunities for participation were provided. Second, Janean was welcomed, accepted and supported. She notes the way that Big hART “get to know you, listen to what you have to say, are there as mentors as well as friends... [so you] are not being judged by what you say.” Importantly in this process of establishing and developing relationships is the development of trust, “they trust that we will do the right thing... you are allowed to get in and help, do stuff, learn stuff”.

⁶ Cystic Fibrosis is one of the most common life shortening genetic diseases. It is manifest in chronic lung infections, requires intensive forms of therapy to keep the airways clear, and is potentially socially isolating in order to reduce the risk of infection.

During this process, the emphasis is always on developing products of quality. Janean recounts her interaction with one team member who “can give you good advice, but she can be hard [in the standards she asks for].” The outcome of this mentoring is “I can now take a picture that could be used as a postcard.” This reflects a third characteristic—that is sharing this work in a public way with others. Janean also noticed the pride that she and others felt as a consequence, “we were impressed with ourselves over that” with some photographs and film work being incorporated into subsequent performances.

Janean also noticed significant changes in others. She shared how: “some people came in with drug problems, then got off the problem” and “you could see them, see how they [realised they] could be doing more stuff.” While it may be hard to determine a singular causal link between the two, it is not unreasonable to attribute Big hART processes significantly impacting on these young people’s lives. These young people, for example, see Big hART as making the difference. This occurs through having a safe and secure place to be where they feel accepted, are engaged in creative work that is purposeful and generative, and supported through the process; that is metaphorically ‘held’ through a time of challenge and change.

Finding a place through giving and receiving

Bruce, a young person with Autism Spectrum Disorder⁷ (AUD), has benefited enormously from his involvement in LUCKY. As a young person he has both gained and given personally and socially, and had needs met through Big hART’s

⁷ AUD manifests itself in communicative and social impairments. Quality of life and functional independence are two of the main most commonly accepted treatment goals for those with AUD.

intentional processes of inclusion. This involvement has involved composing original music for *Radio Holiday*, ‘performing’ this music at the Melbourne International Arts Festival, developing and then employing editing film and production skills, mastering audio and editing software to facilitate this process, and other creative contributions to various project components.

This process has provided Bruce with a range of new opportunities, both social and communicative, that would not have previously been available to him. Bruce highlighted what this had meant: “[It] meant a big challenge to me, a lot of experience for me, meeting some very different people. You don’t get those opportunities very often.” Bruce’s carer also described how School had been a difficult place for him.

The school system was not set up to cope with Bruce. He feels different, [and] it can be crippling and cruel. There wasn’t a lot around for Bruce at school, it was difficult for him, he had a difficult time of it. We still have a long way to go.

However, by way of contrast, “creative communities are very accepting. That in itself is very empowering for Bruce where he is valued for all the beautiful things in his mind.” What this reveals is the way that creative communities where creativity, imagination, and diversity are valued can be both accepting and nurturing of difference. Furthermore, these dispositions are not confined to certain segments of community but exist across them.

Although Bruce has this disorder, Big hART has enabled him to find a place where he is accepted, been able to contribute, and consequently grow through the experience. As his carer observed: “he now has purpose in his life because his life

is music.” One person involved in Disability Services in North West Tasmania describes the benefits of Bruce’s participation with Big hART.

There is one big example, for us, which just shows the potential of what can happen. There’s one person who we’ve supported for many years with autism—Bruce. Here is a guy that every organization around here had tried with. He is a very intelligent guy, but had ‘failed’ continually in open ordinary employment, to a point where we didn’t think we could do anything for him. We connected him to Big hART, and a mentor, and what that has shown is that he works extremely well in the Arts culture. There he composes music, edits film, what he learnt to do there, he pretty well has all the skills of a sound engineer now plus he is fully skilled in film editing [through various software packages].

This was a revelation for this manager.

What it showed me was that people in the Arts community who get involved in those programs are far more tolerant and accepting of him than the hard-nosed business area. And you can tell that he is far more comfortable in that environment than he is in the other. So there is an employment opportunity. It jolted me because none of the employment agencies or disabilities services have ever considered the Arts as an employment option. The suggestion that the Arts might be an area was completely foreign to them. But it is a legitimate place for some people. So you can see the potential for that. And they would be much more accepted, and there might be something there that they were good at. And he has been a raging success in that respect and his skills are incredible.

This is another example of where Big hART has intentionally used the Arts to great benefit in order to establish links and build bridges between seemingly disparate groups; in this case it has provided Bruce, as someone from the ‘fringes’ who has struggled and suffered from a profound lack of self-belief, a better place to be.

In Bruce’s words:

I now have other goals in my life, I want the world to know me not as a stupid person, but as a unique person who is capable of doing things they aren’t capable of doing. I have a lot of perspective on life. I have high expectations of myself. I want to be known as someone who is capable of doing a range of different things.

Lifting understanding

Evidence of impact of Big hART's LUCKY project takes a variety of forms and perspectives. In addition to project participants, there are the observations of those who support them and the subsequent feedback they receive as they circulate through the community.

One mentor, for example, who was significant through her contact with the Tasmanian Police and support of young women in one small town was able to describe the impact of participation and the subsequent growth and change. It is worthwhile recounting her description at length.

On the whole it was very very empowering. To see these girls here talking to you today about how they were feeling just wouldn't have happened two years ago. Definitely wouldn't have happened.

It's given them an opportunity to speak out and to make choices for themselves. Which is what has happened. They made a choice to come in and then they'd say "I'll see how [the project] goes and not commit myself"; and then they have committed themselves. They have been able to make that choice because they know what they are going to get out of it.

As people, as human beings it has lifted their understanding of other people's needs, especially working with the elderly people, I saw some huge changes happening there. They found it very difficult to interview an elderly person about their life, their losses in life. Young people were only in a place where they hadn't had these losses, and then they 'felt' those losses, those feelings of those elderly people. Steph actually came up to me and said to me, "that is the hardest thing I have ever had to do." They were so proud of it because they had actually done it.

From where I'm standing, I've had young offenders in [Big hART project] and not one of them has re-offended. One girl said that she couldn't go back to her life before Big hART involvement. She has chosen not to so that is why I say she has been empowered, enough to make her realise that she is worthy, very worthy and she is very valued. And if ever there was an opportunity for her to go back down that road she would have done that in the last six months, but she has chosen not to. It is very powerful. What I see is that these girls are far more creative, they are more skilled in their own lives.

Important in terms of impact was feedback from the local Police.

I have a really good relationship with the Tasmanian Police and they come and ask me “what are you doing with these people?” They’ve seen huge changes in them since they’ve been involved [in Big hART]. And the ones who have been referred to me that have stayed with the program have either returned to full time education or got full time jobs. One young women, I saw her about six months ago and who I hadn’t seen for twelve months before that and I asked what are you doing? And she told me she is working full time, and in the middle of the process of purchasing her first home; she is concentrating on getting her licence now, she realises the dangers of driving without a licence and the risk she is putting other people at.

And I believe that all has come from the work of being involved in the first stage [of the project] because she took on something that nobody ever believed she would be able to do. And I asked her who was she doing this for? And she said ‘Are you for real? For me, why would I do it for anyone else?’ Whereas before that she only do things to impress other people.

What this narrative reveals is a perspective from which to further understand the impact of Big hART’s work.

LUCKY Builds Connections

A significant outcome of Big hART’s work is the way that social connectedness is built. This was seen in an intergenerational way through *This is Living*. One site for this project component was Smithton Nursing Home, a 32-bed hostel in regional North West Tasmania. At this site isolated young single mums photographed and interviewed residents about their life stories. These stories then informed the development of *This is Living* performance in Burnie Civic Centre (October, 2007). Some residents from Smithton then travelled to Burnie to see this performance. The photos that were taken subsequently became the basis for an exhibition mounted in the hostel itself. This component of the project built inter-generational relationships and allowed the young mums to develop and practice some of the skills taught.

There were benefits for residents, the young people involved, and the broader community.

Residents remember this experience fondly. As one resident noted: “I can remember them [the young women] coming in and talking to us—it felt good.”

Another commented: ‘I can remember talking about to the young girls about the old days, I quite enjoyed it. It was very exciting.’ Marjorie, for example, was one resident whose story and photo was used for the performance. This story, reflecting her yodelling and dancing, appeared in the script for the show together with her photo projected on the back wall. In the words of one carer: “She got quite a lot out of it. She was very well known in the community at that time and [the experience] took her out of herself.”

Another resident, Ila, commented in relation to the young people that: “I enjoyed their company, they encouraged me to talk too much (laughter). I didn’t expect to hear [the story] back on the CD either (much laughter).” For this resident, who a carer described as lonely, isolated and consequently “quite happy with her own company,” this social interaction was significant as she became more animated through the process.

What this reveals is that this aspect of the project opens up lines of communication between two groups that would otherwise been unlikely to meet and communicate. One resident, for example, discovered that one young woman who interviewed her came from King Island, where she was born. This facilitated a connection between them that would never have occurred if not for the opportunity that the project provided. One carer also reported how this participant had

‘strengthened her memory’ listening again to this story as told to the interviewee. She also takes “pleasure in hearing it again on CD”; this process acting as a springboard into other dimly lit memories “some happy, some sad” making them clearer. As the carer noted: “Things that she normally wouldn’t think about—it tickled the brain a little bit.” Nevertheless, as one 95 year old resident recounted: “I enjoyed it... it brought back such a lot of childhood memories,” [the other residents agreed].

The photo exhibition⁸ that was part of this aspect of *This is Living* was important in bringing attention to these older Australians. It also brought people from the community into the Nursing Home for purposes other than duty or care. In the words of the manager: “It just brought everyone together, it was lovely and well worthwhile for the residents.” The manager went on to note: “The photos were superbly done—we had a lot of comments about that—from people who had never set foot in the place; which was good. It set up some very good interaction [between] the residents and visitors.” Also family members who had not visited residents for some time came in to have their photos taken together with some of these photos appearing in the local paper. What this highlights is that way that this project strengthened relationships between people and reduced social isolation.

The manager reported initially feeling sceptical about how the project would go. However, as a result of the experience she noted how: “It was very rewarding for many of them. It was something else for them to think about, and they felt special in their own right. And they thoroughly enjoyed the photos and exhibition.”

⁸ The young women who were part of the project took photos of the residents and these were mounted in the corridors of the home as part of an exhibition of their work.

What she would do differently if the opportunity presented itself again was not take the residents to Burnie for the show as it was too hard on them. What this observation revealed was the importance of considering resident's physical condition and challenges in relation to acoustics in the theatre, access and travel. This further highlights the benefits of bringing young people to the Nursing Home and the way that Big hART is flexible in approach thereby reducing barriers to various forms of participation.

The most significant thing for the manager was bringing the younger and older generation together in a context—an aged care facility—that normally wouldn't happen, and “they [both older and younger people] became more comfortable as they went along. The whole thing was very well done. It made [the residents] very happy.” For example, some young people had never before set foot in a Nursing Home.

One subsequent legacy from this process was interest expressed from the local high school in bringing English students in to interview residents and capture their life histories. In this sense, the project has the potential to facilitate some ongoing benefits for residents and the community in which they live. One young person recounted how one of the residents in particular had shown her how life: “is what you make of it... I just hope that if am to reach their age and if my children do, we can all have the same positive attitude about it all.”

The SK8rs

A further aspect of intergenerational connection grew from the inclusion of young skaters. *This is Living* is the involvement of young skaters. This group of young men

ranging in age from 12 to 19, included those who skate regularly in and around Burnie. This group are often seen as an 'undesirable element' in the community as they are seen as representing a counter culture and impinging on public space and safety. These skaters have been involved with Big hART through their connection with a Big hART worker/skater and the SK8 event. Through this involvement, skaters were introduced to *This is Living* culminating in a performance event at Burnie Civic Theatre in 2008. This component of LUCKY sought to bring different elements of the community together in order to explore issues of 'quality of life, aging, and intergenerational exchange' and is described this way.

This is Living works in small communities on Australia's fringes, inviting them to be part of a vibrant and dynamic process that highlights their stories. In each community young people interview the keepers of the stories, older people are involved in performance workshops, archival photographs are collected and skaters add their kinetic ability to this intricate tapestry. (<http://www.thisisliving.org.au/about.html>)

Three different groups, skaters, young single mothers and older Australians were brought together through this performance aspect of the project. The skaters added life and a dynamic quality to the performance launch at Burnie Civic Theatre through skating, and this added a layer of contemporary cultural poetics to the performance text.

This is Living is a work in process in the sense that it is a creative community process that built towards a touring performance piece involving storytelling, performance & photography for 2009 *Ten Days on the Island Festival*. What is significant about this project component is the way that these three seemingly disparate groups became connected through performance.

Ben (12) described how he was skating on the temporary ramp in the old marine shed adjacent to the Big hART office. He was invited by a Big hART team member to be involved. As a result of this invitation Ben described how: “we got to skate in the show [*This is Living*]. We went down and helped set up some of the ramps that we had down in the shed, and we were skating in the background. And it was heaps good.”

Wade (14) highlighted how the performance enabled them to be recognised for something skilful that they could do.

It was unusual because most of the members of the audience were older members of the community and usually they are the ones who look down on us because they think that we are a bunch of rat bags and up to no good. And it was really weird because they paid to see us skate [in the show]. And we were skating as people came in before the show and they were saying Wow! Look at that!

This recognition was important to these skaters because skating is an important part of their lives. Chad (15), shared these sentiments this way: “It was funny because my teacher came to see me skate, and this girl in my class came to see me skate too and it was pretty funny. My teacher said, ‘you were not at school’ and I said, ‘no, I was skating’ (laugh)”. Another student, attending a different school added: “Teachers and heaps of random people from the school recognised me and said I was a good skater and that I did a pretty good with it and that. It was pretty different.”

What this meant was that these young people were recognised for their abilities rather than their ‘deficiencies’. In addition there was a range of learning occurring. For example, there was the discipline associated with having to be part of a performance event. Wade described that in performance skaters needed to have

focus, be precise, concentrate and cooperate: “I also learnt a fair bit about stage craft, like where you had to be on stage and entrances and exits and stuff.” Drew agreed:

I was really scared because I’ve never been in anything like this before. And up there [on stage] you’ve got to be really good to do stuff like this, because there is a whole lot of skaters up there. You have to watch out. I’d never been on stage before. **Never.**

These abilities, often valued in the world of work, are not always well developed in schools. One skater (17), who had been excluded from school, described how he cared about what they did in performance and would like to ‘work’ to higher standards. From having difficulties at school where he was: “banned from drama all through school. I wasn’t allowed in that area of the school [where drama was taught], and I was also banned from music, woodwork, metal work and PE” to an observation that, “I’d definitely do it again. That was cool. I reckon we could do it a bit tighter. And I said to Scott [Rankin, Artistic Director Big hART] if you ever need me to do a show or stuff I’d be in it.” What this reveals is that when young people can be engaged, and their experiences valued, then good things happen.

A different young man, Sam (18) shared the way that this experience had given him:

[A] whole different perspective on old people, kind of thing, like they’re not just out to make our life hell. Instead of just seeing them as people who just don’t care about us, I now look at them as like an opportunity to learn, like they’ve been through the same stuff we have.

The highlight for these young men, however, was the respect earned for the culture they valued. Kelly (17), who had very challenging life circumstances noted:

After the show people started clapping, they saw ‘us’ for the first time. They used to see it as like a criminal sort of thing, and after they seen that [the show], they saw it as more artistic and stuff like that, and more respect for us. It’s like a creative sport. We see everything a lot

different to everyone else. Like we see something in skating, and then we think what else we can do with it? And try different things.

Isaac (14) agreed: “You have a creative mind when you are skating, like how can I use that handrail? It takes skill, and you say like, ‘can you skate it?’”

These young men, often at the edge of society and pushing against its boundaries, consequently had new experiences of being recognised, and feeling like they had strengths and abilities in contrast to feeling powerless and invalidated; they were engaged, purposeful and directed in something that felt authentic.

Finally, in the words of one skater: “It was fully sic [fun].”

LUCKY Productively Engages Young People

There are multiple lines of evidence to suggest that participation in LUCKY productively engages the brain, activates the imagination, and helps participants acquire new or strengthens existing skills. For example, through her involvement Ali learnt how to take photographs and has since been employed, had her photographs included as part of an exhibition, and as a consequence, sees this as a viable career option; one that would not normally be part of a cultural learning opportunity available in her remote community.

Second, arts participation afforded through LUCKY has aesthetic value. This is a consequence of high artistic standards that Big hART is able to engender in their work. What this means for participants, is that quality of life is altered in some way by art. For example, working hard to achieve an outcome that receives public acclaim and recognition can reveal a world where issues of quality matter. Furthermore, Big hART processes show project participants that this is achievable

for them. This is one of the most profound consequences of arts participation, and means that other benefits can accrue for these participants.

Third, participation in these projects enables participants to use the arts to give shape and form to feeling. What participants report is that there is a depth of self-knowledge gained through artistic practices. For example, one young mum described through the format of the *Scream* zine⁹ how: “the thought of getting older used to be frightening. It still is, but in a way, they have shown me that it can be a positive experience.” This means that emotional literacy¹⁰ can be enhanced through the ability to identify and communicate feelings.

Fourth, participants describe how participation connects them with their community. This means that Big hART develops socio-cultural capital¹¹. Fifth, Big hART also provides a means for formulating social critique and commentary that reflects participants’ concerns and experiences—in this sense it is political and strengthens both citizenship and democracy.

Sixth, LUCKY in its many components has been transformational where project participants describe how they are ‘transformed’ through induction into possible future worlds that were either unknown or perceived to be inaccessible. Finally, each of these elements as part of a complex dynamic come together to influence identity development in a powerful way where values such as pride, self-respect,

⁹ “Scream” is a zine—a small circulation non-commercial publication—used to provide a voice for young mums to express their feelings.

¹⁰ The ability to identify and communicate feelings has long been understood to be important in communication.

¹¹ Socio-cultural capital is a sociological term used to help understand how groups can be differentiated, and consequently brought together.

dignity, self-confidence and self-esteem combine to allow participants to see life as if it could be otherwise (Greene, 1995).

What this evidence also reveals is that there are specific values associated with arts participation. This further substantiates Brown's (2004) research where a framework is proposed that reveals the interaction between seven domains including the cognitive, aesthetic, physical, emotional, socio-cultural, political, and the spiritual.

It is this complex dynamic that shows how LUCKY resonates with participants. What this means is that there is not just one benefit associated with participation, that these benefits are contingent on each other, and different benefits accrue for individuals depending on their level of participation and what they bring with them in terms of prior experiences. *Drive*, for example, strengthened civic engagement for a group of young people normally 'inaccessible' to Local Government. The *SK8 JAM* events provided further evidence that civic and community pride, and a sense of place and belonging not previously present, were developed. Consequently, one impact of the project has been that disused and everyday spaces have been transformed into something new or better, and participants have seen more value in their surroundings and everyday objects.

Different components of *Radio Holiday/Drive In Holiday*, *This is Living*, and *Drive* have contributed to **Identity Formation** with participants reporting an enhanced sense of self through a better understanding of 'who I am?' and 'how I fit in?' Associated with this are feelings of improved self-confidence, direction and focus. There is sense of accomplishment, achievement and pride associated with being

engaged with a process that has seen perseverance rewarded—all qualities valued in the world of work. What this means for participants is that identity is strengthened through an enhanced sense of self-esteem, self-worth and dignity.

Benefits to individuals have also been realised through project elements of LUCKY with a physical component, skating for example, also holds various physical health-related benefits. These include: exercise, developing fitness/staying fit, the development of movement skills and co-ordination, and improved body image—all within the context of an accessible popular cultural form.

It is the linking of the activity category “I love skating”, with social relevance “my friends are involved”, with cultural relevance “it’s cool” that is consistent with young people’s cultural identity as skater/young person. When these links are realised young people are engaged and their level of participation deepened; this allows other benefits to accrue as a consequence.

Further impacts of the project can be seen in the way that the aesthetic values promoted by Big hART include the transformation of spaces. In *This is Living* for example, photographs that young women took of nursing home residents were displayed in Smithton transforming the space into something more than what it was thereby imbuing the everyday space of the nursing home with aesthetic value. What this means is that quality of space is changed improving aesthetic sensibilities, and awakening new creative outlets in others.

This process awakens the imagination and can give shape to feelings potentially left dormant in older people’s lives. For these young women, for example, the work has an additional political dimension as they also inquire into the lives of older

people and the way they live. There is also added value for the residents in the way that cultural memory is accessed as they recount and then are reminded of things forgotten.

A significant feature of LUCKY is the performances associated with it. For example, the performances associated with *Radio Holiday* and *Drive In Holiday* contained substantial performative elements. The benefits associated with this participation has been the improvement in participant's attention span, and improved analytical skills as they creatively problem solve through arts processes.

Secondly, individual's aesthetic sensibilities are strengthened as a show is developed that needs to work theatrically in order to communicate with an audience. Next, participants understand more about their cultural heritage as informants are interviewed as a basis for script development; for audience member's, cultural memory is accessed through the performances themselves.

Levels of participation

It is also important to understand that changes occur and benefits accrue depending on participant's level of involvement. For example, being involved conducting interviews with community members is one level of involvement, being involved with arts practices and creating an aesthetically pleasing product is another, while a third is the peripheral participation that occurs through being an audience member of such artefacts.

There are potential for a range of benefits for different audiences. These include the activation of the imagination, the connection of ideas, the ability to educate and transfer values, the ability to 'escape' and take a 'journey' away from the sameness

of everyday life, and the opportunity to process emotions and get in touch feelings. Interestingly, there is also a political dimension and affective dimension particularly evident in *Drive* where the audience has the potential to be disturbed by what they see in relation to youth suicide. It is this linking of feeling with thought that is rich in potential for behavioural and attitudinal change.

Big hART invites generative arts participation

One powerful way to think about benefits of participation revolves around the level of creative control that participants have. What is important about this level of control is that it is not contingent on skill level. This means that participants without sophisticated skills or prior experience can benefit from participation without these benefits contingent on established skills and knowledge. Brown (2004), for example, describes five modes of participation ranging from ‘inventive’ where the mind, body and spirit are engaged in a creative act—in this sense being generative—through decreasing levels of creative control; ‘interpretive, curatorial, observational’ then to ‘ambient’ where there is an experience of art that has not been intentionally selected. In each component of LUCKY—*Radio Holiday/Drive In Holiday, This is Living*, and *Drive*—participants have engaged with the project to varying degrees. The most profound benefits have accrued to those most involved with the creative act; this has included photography, film making, oral history, script development, creative writing and the like. However, those who have observed the products of this work also benefit from the experience. What Big hART purposefully does is seek to work with particular groups to engage them through various involvement opportunities hence developing benefits through participation.

What arts participation does then—as promoted through each project component—is not only bring benefits to individuals, but importantly to individuals in context; this being reflected in the way that project participants go inside themselves to draw on and strengthen their own creativity, but also go out to others to engage and communicate to those around them.

Adding value through arts-based methodologies

Big hART as an exemplary provider of social impact programs uses arts-based methodologies to add value to their work. Ongoing evaluations of Big hART's work identify that there are different layers of value to their work (MacCallum, et al., 2006; Wright & Palmer, 2007). These different values are added through processes that include intentionally improving access and removing inhibitors to participation (pragmatic, economic, social), and inclusive ways of working that militate against psychological barriers to participation.

Big hART effectively uses arts practice to achieve these aims. For example, Big hART attends purposefully to each of the seven value/benefit clusters described previously (Brown 2004). This attention allows Big hART to be responsive to specific community needs and innovate as a consequence. For example, the artefacts produced—theatre, multi-media, film/documentary, photographic exhibitions—are relevant to participants through the specific works produced. These forms are meaningful, familiar and accessible through and have social and cultural relevance. Each of these—relevance and accessibility—are markers of quality (Cowling, 2004) and add to the growing body of evidence that identify Big hART as international leaders in their field (Wright & Palmer, 2007).

What this developing body of evidence enable us to observe is that the deeper the immersive experience that participants have, and the greater the degree of creative control, the greater the benefits that accrue and the higher the inclination is for participants to increase future participation. Consequently Big HART’S processes involve a process of **engaging** participants, **involving** them through removal of barriers, and then **deepening** the experience to create meaning and relevance to them.

This process, developed out of Big hART’s 18 years of effective practice, is illustrative of McCarthy and Jennet’s (2001) research that considered motivations and inhibitors to people’s participation in the arts. What this research revealed, and Big hART ameliorates, are specific inhibitors for participation; these include perceptions of participants that are shaped by socio-demographics, personality, prior experiences, and socio-cultural identity. Consequently the process of **engagement** for this demographic—marginalised, disenfranchised, low socio-economic status—is critical. Without engagement as a critical first step, nothing else can happen. Second, Big hART attends to practical barriers of participation; these include, for example, providing transport, keeping costs low or subsidised, and providing food or childcare; consequently allowing participants to be involved.

Third, by honouring and giving shape and form to participant’s stories through arts processes, meaning is deepened for them and consequently participants identify these experiences as being ‘authentic’ in the sense that are engaging, relevant, genuine and meaningful—in short, they resonate with their lives.

Consequently it is possible to see across several components of LUCKY a range of impacts that are consistent to the project as a whole.

Benefits associated with Big hART's LUCKY project

	Project Components		
Benefits	Radio Holiday/ Drive in Holiday	This is Living	Drive
Somatic (physical)	√	√	√
Cognitive	√	√	√
Affective (emotional)	√	√	√
Spiritual	√	√	√

What this table reveals is aspects to this work that run across, and are consistent in each of the various project components.

Suggestions for Future Practice

If then we accept that there is a range of values associated with Big hART projects then, following Brown (2004), these should form the basis of promoting Big hART's work. For example, actively promoting these values, powerfully advocates that such projects are a good investment at a range of levels. Second, removing inhibitors to participation promotes engagement—this could be further developed in future project work. Third, intentionally adding layers of value to the experience through immersion and weaving in the seven identified domains—cognitive, aesthetic, physical, emotional, socio-cultural, political, and the spiritual can be purposeful and evolutionary thereby deepening the immersive experience, helping participants make meaning in their lives, and adding value to the experience.

Summary Comments

In overview, what Big hART exemplifies through LUCKY in all of its breadth is the personal importance of arts practice in: forming well-rounded and well-functioning individuals able to enjoy life and take part in society; promoting social justice; promoting individual and collective creative abilities; and strengthening and affirming identity and citizenship. What this reflects in practice is engaging participants through their creativity, imaginations, and curiosity as makers of culture, rather than passive recipients and consumers of it.

Big hART does this through employing arts practice that is innovative and risk taking—a large part of why it is attractive to young people in the first place—but in stark contrast to the risk management policies put in place by bureaucracies. However, while this happens locally in the North West Coast of Tasmania, it is emblematic of broader shifts internationally. John Holden (2008 p. 39) in his consultation paper for DEMOS expresses it this way:

Culture is shifting from being a peripheral pursuit—about leisure and recreation—to being a subject that is at the heart of life. The landscape has been transformed by the growth of the creative economy, issues of identity, diversity, the influence of culture in international relations, rising inequality, digitisation and new technology.

Consequently, Big hART plays a larger voice in this changing landscape in the way that they foster, engage, protect marginalised voices so that they can be expressed. Levine (2008), for example, a cultural commentator argues that this process is essential in provoking democracy and consequently civic participation.

This particular aspect of Big hART's work can then be seen to be part of a much bigger theme where artists are increasingly contextualising themselves and understood in terms of the social. Hence, LUCKY is a manifestation of how Big

hART works as a cultural educator; working with the marginalised to explain, teach and advocate providing access to cultural learning and creative opportunities.

In short, Big hART intersects social context, cultural traditions, with artistic ambitions for project participants. What this means is that LUCKY provides for participants a way of **seeing**, a way of **knowing**, and a **different way of being**, all in the presence and support of others. This can be understood as employing and developing a particular form of 'artistic citizenship' (Schmidt Campbell & Martin, 2006) that brings together the social, the aesthetic and representation. Martin (2006 p. 3) describes this as particular form of social good that "brings forth ideas about our lives together." *Drive, This is Living*, and *Radio/Drive In Holiday* as components of LUCKY are then both a means and an ends. In the words of one young mum: "it is called LUCKY because you get to do lots of creative things."

References

- Brown, A. S. (2004). *The Values Study: Rediscovering the Meaning and Value of Arts Participation*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, Arts Division.
- Cowling, J. (Ed.). (2004). *For Art's Sake: Society and the Arts in the 21st Century*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research.
- Douglass, A., & Vogler, T. A. (Eds.). (2003). *Witness & Memory: The Discourse of Trauma*. New York: Routledge.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Holden, J. (2008). *Culture and Learning: Towards a New Agenda*. London: DEMOS.
- Levine, C. (2008). *Provoking Democracy: Why We Need the Arts*. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons.
- MacCallum, J., Palmer, D., Wright, P. R., Cumming-Potvin, W., Brooker, M., & Tero, C. (2006). *Community Building Through Intergenerational Exchange Programs*. Canberra: National Youth Affairs Research Scheme.
- Martin, R. (2006). Artistic Citizenship. In M. Schmidt Campbell & R. Martin (Eds.), *Artistic Citizenship: A Public Voice for the Arts* (pp. 1-22). New York: Routledge.
- McCarthy, K. F., & Jinnett, K. (2001). *A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts*. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation.
- Schmidt Campbell, M., & Martin, R. (Eds.). (2006). *Artistic Citizenship: A Public Voice for the Arts*. New York: Routledge.
- Silbereisen, R. K., & Lerner, R. M. (2007). *Approaches to Positive Youth Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wright, P. R., & Palmer, D. (2007). *People now know me for something positive: An evaluation of Big hART's work at the John Northcott Estate*. Perth: Murdoch University.

Appendix

Funding and Support

Various levels of funding and support were received from the following organisations:

Attorney Generals National Community Crime Prevention Project
Department of Transport & Regional Services - Regional Partnerships Programme
Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Mental Health Community Based Programme
Australia Council's **Tasmanian Regional Engagement Strategy**
Fosters Foundation
Ian Potter Foundation
Caledonia Foundation
Foundation for Regional and Rural Renewal
Women's Tasmania
Tasmanian Community Fund
Foundation for Young Australians (in partnerships with II Heads Crew)
Australia Council for the Arts – Community Partnership
Tasmanian Government Youth Advisory Services
Wynyard – Waratah Council – Youth Strategy
Regional Arts Tasmania
Perpetual Trustees managed funds that included the Gailbrath C& B Trust, Myer EB Charity Fund. Irwin Enid Charitable Trust
Regional Express Airlines/ Burnie Airport
Burnie City Council
Tourism Tasmania
TOLL Shipping
Fibre Optic Magic Railton
Cement Australia
Auspine/ Stubbs Mitre 10
Artery – Art Supplies
Frank Haines – SBS TV
Headway Northwest
Lighthouse Film Society
Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation
Tim Last: Jolly Rogers on the Beach and Waji Spiby: Waji
Melbourne International Arts Festival
Ten Days on the Island Festival

A range of other in kind sponsors including: Resolution X and Outlook, Dorset Council, Elders Wynyard, Bakers Dozen, Shorewell IGA, Parkside Funeral Services, Creative Paper Mill, Buckaneers, Wynyard Wharf Seafoods, Radcliffe Removals, Save a Buck, Just Art Frames Burnie, Australian Paper, Wynyard

Photos, Hot Mother Café, Steve Walker Sails, Xerox Burnie, Port Latta, Reflexions Dance Studio, Wynyard Sailing Club, Vintage Caravans, Wynyard – Waratah Council, CHAC, Northwest Residential Support Service, Wynyard High School.



It's called LUCKY because you get to do lots of creative things