

An Art Happening in the Western Suburbs

The positive role that the arts can play in fulfilling the potential of people with disabilities is demonstrated by a recent initiative of Arts Access. **Art Day** provides a creative outlet for people with intellectual disabilities who live in the western suburbs.

The **Art Day** group meet every Friday at a community centre in Spotswood. The program is designed to stimulate and develop the artistic expression of everyone involved through inspirational activities. The focus is on accessibility and especially on having a good time. Funded by Health and Community Services, the program is facilitated by visual artist, Lyndsay Mason and performance artist, Claire Teisen. Both accomplished in their fields, and with a successful history of working with intellectually disabled people, they have an easy rapport with the participants.

The project is not intended to be therapy-oriented. "A lot of programs are designed with social education in mind, but this is a day where we have a lot of fun and create something," Claire said.

Claire, Lyndsay and the support workers involved all agree that the program has many benefits. The support workers have remarked on how keen everyone is to come on Friday mornings. "Even for the quiet ones who may not appear to be actively involved, the group environment provides stimulation as they observe others having fun and interacting," Claire said.

A young man who requires one-to-one support has shown obvious progress in the three weeks he has been attending the program. As he is



David and Gary act out a story

responding to the harmonious environment, his challenging behaviours have noticeably decreased.

Visual art activities include painting, printmaking, drawing, mask-making, photography and ceramics. Performance art includes music, mime, movement, dance and drama.

The day begins with everyone sitting in a circle and doing warm-up exercises. Then the real fun begins. One popular game which requires fine movements and co-ordination involves standing on a piece of paper, then seeing how small the paper can be folded without stepping over the edges. "It's a great game for a competition and that gets the attention of the entire group," Claire said. "People love to play games - they leave their inhibitions at the door and we see their personalities being expressed," Lyndsay added.

Lyndsay, who has a background in

community theatre and visual art, remarked on how the group's painting and drawing skills have developed during the program. "To begin with, nearly everyone was fixed in one kind of visual expression. Now, many of the participants are experimenting with different uses of mediums and new concepts", she said.

Claire, who studied theatre in Paris for two years, has introduced a tradition of mask-making into the current program. This form originated in Switzerland where communities create masks based on real characters and myths for their village festivals. Everyone at Art Day has fashioned a

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Arts Access programs

The Artistic Program

The Artistic Program reflects Arts Access aim of making the arts more accessible to people with disabilities and people disadvantaged by social conditions. Arts Access projects can have a significant impact on the communities in which they take place, in a number of ways. They can change the physical environment through the creation of permanent artworks; they can alter the social environment through providing an avenue for interaction; they can positively impact on people's perceptions of their own and other's potential for creative endeavours; and they can change the way people feel about the community in which they live.

Practical arts projects are initiated in diverse community settings, working with all forms of the arts to develop the artistic, social and physical skills of

participants and to promote their personal well-being.

Arts Access is increasingly becoming a national leader in its field, through initiatives such as the booklet *Healthy Arts*, which is designed to stimulate the long-term development of self-sustaining arts programs within the public health system.

Arts Access is also playing a vital role in promoting arts and disabilities at the national level through the development of the national advocacy network, Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts Australia (DADAA). Its role is to lobby government on appropriate arts policy relating to disabled and disadvantaged people. Current issues include the accessibility of tertiary education in the arts and opportunities for disabled artists to utilise their potential to achieve professional status.



ART DAY'S SISTER

The Creative Arts Program, funded by Health and Community Services, operates in the southern region at the Linden - St. Kilda Arts Centre with up to 21 participants attending each Friday. The program offers an exciting range of music, movement, drama, mime and mask activities. Professional artists provide workshops which encourage creative expression and develop artistic skills. For details, contact Barbara at Arts Access, on 699 8299.

EASE

Through its low-price ticketing and specialised seating service, the Entertainment Access Service assists people with disabilities and those disadvantaged by social conditions to attend mainstream entertainment and sporting events. This has created thousands of opportunities for cultural involvement and social interaction each year, including tickets to the Ford Australian Open and the NBL basketball matches and the intention is to expand further in this direction.

Membership is open to individuals and organisations who meet EASE eligibility criteria.

For information and bookings contact Dean Michael on 699 7636.

The Resource and Training Unit

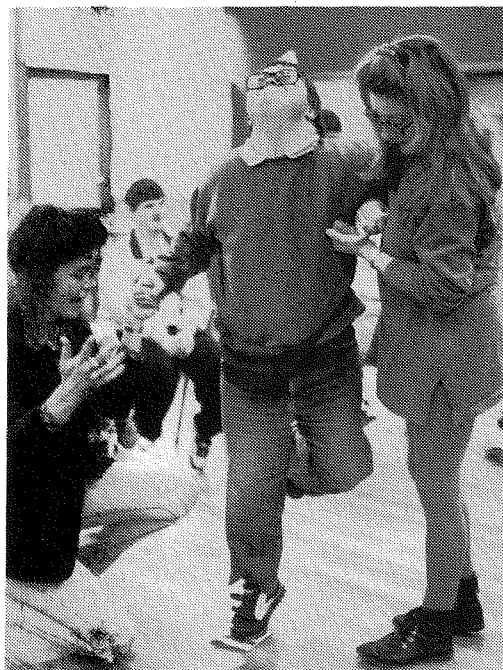
This is a vital facility in the development of community based arts programs with special needs groups in Australia. As an information and consultancy service, the Resource Unit can assist communities in establishing their own arts programs.

The Resource and Training Unit manages a major collection of printed and audio-visual materials on the arts as they relate to disability and social disadvantage. The Collection is open for public inspection during office hours and is a valuable aid for disability support workers who wish to introduce the arts to their services, or for artists who wish to gain new skills.

Training workshops for agency staff and service providers can introduce different ways in which the arts can be utilised.

The Resource and Training Unit continues to work in regions where there's a need for staff training and resources, such as Gippsland,

PICTURE: VERITY QUEALE



David dances on a square of paper, with encouragement from artists Claire (left) and Lyndsay (right) at Art Day.

Wodonga and Malmesbury, so that community members can come together in a spirit of creativity. The Unit could organise a workshop catering to your specific needs.

For more information, call Carol Downey at Arts Access on 699 8299.

Art Day cont..

"Happiness can change to sadness in one gesture, its magic. The same mask can vary, depending on who's wearing it" - Claire Teisen.



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papier mache mask from modelling clay moulded over tin cans. Leaving the masks unpainted highlights their expressiveness and allows the personality of the wearer to come through.

The masks have become precious to those who made them and one way in which they are used is as props in the stories which the group creates every week. With prompting from Lyndsay and Claire, the participants might act out a journey in which one person carries a special treasure to give to a friend in a faraway place. The group decides on the nature of the journey - through a jungle, over a snow mountain or across a busy highway. Everyone gets involved as they watch the performers navigate the various obstacles, using mime. Traditionally, mask plays are unspoken but here conventions are ignored and speech is encouraged. It's a treat for the audience to watch and the performers love the audience's reaction. "Most of the participants really appreciate the attention and so they give a good performance," Claire said.

As a seasoned performer and teacher, Claire explained why she enjoyed working with people who have intellectual disabilities. "These people give so much of themselves, without resistance or expectations. In the theatre, play and improvisation are so important and they are wonderfully gifted in those qualities."

Towards the end of the course, Claire and Lindsay would like to create an event using masks, music, performance, and artwork. This will give group members the chance to perform to an audience of family and friends.

Art Day is available for adults registered with Intellectual Disability Services in the Western Region. For information contact Barbara Doherty, the Art Day Program Co-ordinator at Arts Access on 699 8299.

Left: Drawing at Art Day with (from left) David, Kerrie and Maria and (above) Maria.



PICTURE: VERITY QUEALE

Art Beat

Performance Art Options for People with Intellectual Disabilities

Art Day is an ongoing Arts Access program which aspires to bring together a group of people with intellectual disabilities to create long-term artistic projects. The purpose of Art Day and the projects that evolve from it is to help each person positively identify and express themselves within their community. "As there are currently places available, we'd like to involve more people in Art Day on a regular basis," said the program coordinator, Barbara Doherty.

"In the future, we'd like to focus on specific project-making where workshop members can collaborate with other community groups to create and design large-scale projects, such as an outdoor mural or installation, or to participate in a community festival. At Arts Access, we firmly believe that active participation in the creative process enables people to understand and strengthen their cultural identity," Barbara said.

Participate in the West, a special event day initiated by the **Art Day** Program comprised workshops and performances for western suburbs residents with intellectual disabilities. The event was held on June 28 at the Maribyrnong Community Centre. The purpose of the day was to bring a variety of people together to explore creative art and to provide an opportunity for people to witness performers with disabilities. Workshops on the day included music, theatre and visual arts. The afternoon performance presented several exciting and unique works, including Sonja Teuben from Back to Back Theatre in a solo act called 'Gina's Story'. As a duo, Claire Teisen and John Tonso performed mask theatre and juggling and finally, the audience was captivated by the African rhythms of the percussion group Adzohu.

This pilot edition of the Art Day bulletin was written and designed by Kerrie Byrne. Photos by Verity Queale - phone 696 7814. Additional artwork thanks to the Art Day participants.



PICTURE: VERITY QUEALE



Claire and Debbie in a performing mood at Art Day

Professional opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities have significantly increased over the last five years. Throughout Australia, new performing groups are emerging, which include people with disabilities. Two such groups are **Big Bag** and **Back to Back Theatre** which both appeared recently in the *Next Wave Festival*.

Big Bag

Originating out of a joint project with performing arts students at Deakin University and Geelong's Corilong Centre in 1987, this 'disability-fuelled rock band' has achieved a unique status in the Australian rock scene. The acclaim that Big Bag has received reflects its innovative work in breaking down the barriers for people with disabilities.

Four of Big Bag's seven members have an intellectual disability and together with the three others they write, record and perform their own melodic dance-pop songs.

Back to Back

As Australia's only professional company of its kind, Geelong's Back to Back theatre company transforms the issues that confront people with intellectual disabilities into vibrant and professional theatre. Arising out of the same community arts project as Big Bag, the core artists are five actors with intellectual disabilities.

In their recent work, 'Voices of Desire', which played to packed houses in Melbourne and Geelong, questions of love, marriage and parenthood were explored, from a disability perspective.

ARTS
Access

Celebrating 20 years of Participation, Innovation and Excellence, 1974-1994

The Western Region Creative Arts Program is funded by Health and Community Services, Intellectual Disability Services and is managed by Arts Access.

Arts Access is assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body; Arts Victoria, a division of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism; and Health and Community Services.

