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MEDIA RELEASE

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MAKING THE ARTS WORK FOR EVERYONE

KANGAROOS AND AUSTRALIAN BEACH SCENES MAKE THE BIG TIME IN CHINESE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Two large murals featuring Australian beach scenes and kangaroos and Chinese panda bears, temples and bicycles adorn two Chinese primary schools for disabled children thanks to a four weeks cultural exchange program organised by Melbourne-based organisation Arts Access.

Visual artists Jennifer McCarthy and Claire Humphrys-Hunt have just returned from completing two visual arts projects with intellectually disabled children in Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu Province, and Changchun, the capital of Jilin Province.

The aim of the program was to establish a relationship between the Australian artists and Chinese children, educators and disability agencies in order to explore collaborative and contemporary art practice and techniques. The result was two giant canvas murals, 4 metres by 3.5 metres in size. The murals are a mix of Chinese and Australian landscapes, including Australian vistas of beaches and sea, the outback, and kangaroos to Chinese vistas of mountains, bicycles, temples and panda bears.

The students ranged in age from 5 to 15 years of age. They had a variety of disabilities including hearing impairment, partial blindness, cerebral palsy, and intellectual disability.

"Their graphic ability was phenomenal and their detail of observation remarkable," said Jennifer McCarthy, who lives in Port Fairy.

"What the project demonstrated is that although we come from completely different situations and countries, art is a truly universal language, and kids are kids the world over," said Claire Humphrys-Hunt who lives in Melbourne.

Jennifer and Claire are Victorian community based artists who have worked with a diverse range of community groups. Both have established collaborative visual arts projects within hospital settings, with people with psychiatric disabilities, school children, the frail and elderly and with women groups, across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

The four week cultural exchange program to China was organised by Arts Access and funded through the Community Cultural Development Board of the Australia Council, with sponsorship from Qantas, and the support of the Australian Embassy in Beijing.

Arts Access is an independent non-profit arts organisation with a mission to create cultural opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities and people disadvantaged by social conditions. Operating for over 20 years, Arts Access is acknowledged as a leader in the field and delivers a range of programs, including the Artistic Program which involves artist in residence projects conducted in community setting, such as prisons, hospitals, senior citizen centres, youth groups, and psychiatric clinics.

Note To Editors

For more information or an interview, please telephone John Myers on 03 9818 6339 or Bobbie Hodge on 03 9699 8868.

Colour Transparencies are available.

Donations of \$2 and over are tax deductible. Exempt from Victorian Probate and Federal Estate Duty. Arts Access Society is Incorporated in Victoria under the Corporations Act of 1981.

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 & Community Services.

