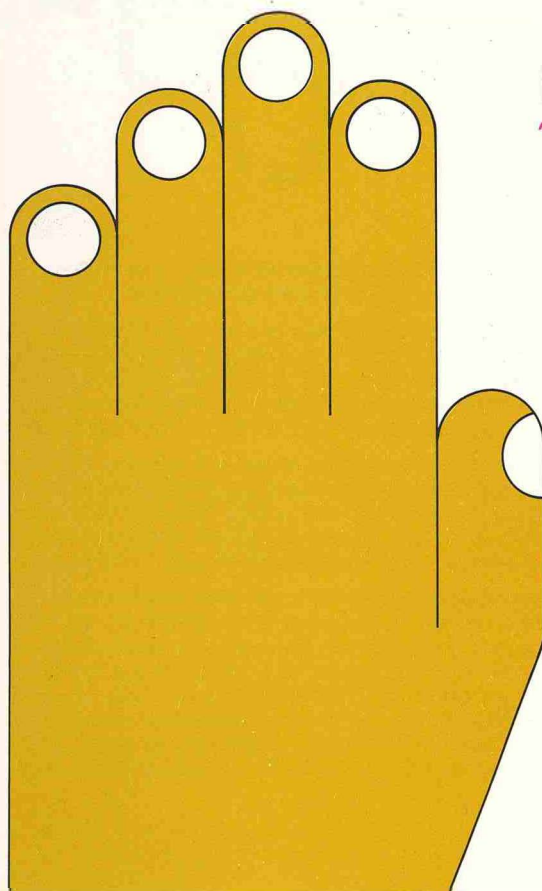




ARTS ACCESS

**ARTS
ACCESS
SOCIETY**

C/- The Victorian Arts Council
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Melbourne 3004



**Will you help
others pretend?**



**Will you assist them
re-establish their lives?**



**Will you help give
them a feeling of family
security?**



Hartnett House, Emergency accommodation for children Brunswick

Hartnett House caters for approximately 16 children in the 2-10 years age group. They are mostly emergency placements (children who have to come into care for a few weeks or a couple of months because of some family crisis) or State Wards who are in care for a longer period until they can either go home, or some alternative form of care is found for them. These children are usually just the innocent victims of circumstances beyond their control and often beyond their comprehension, and often they have missed out on many of the things in life which we would consider 'normal'. Hartnett House endeavours to expose the children to some of these 'normal' experiences, but rarely is there money available to do much. In 1979 Arts Access Society contributed \$450 which enabled the children to be taken out to attend children's theatre, puppet shows, etc. They then had an artist in to do a six-week programme of music and drama with the children, and a number of them benefited from this.

However, the programme only lasted six weeks and there aren't the funds to conduct another one. There is a family of four children who have been admitted since then who have missed out. They range in age from 3-8 years. At home they had no father and an inadequate mother who is in and out of psychiatric institutions. The children have been made wards. The only life they have known was one where you struggle to survive, which involves competing with everyone, even your brothers and sisters; they have no feeling of family security. They need to have some positive, happy experiences together as a group, to do some of the 'normal' family things they've never known. They need a medium which would enable them to pretend sometimes instead of always being confronted by the harsh reality of their lives. Only when they can let go some of the anxiety can they begin to relate to each other and their peers.

According to the staff at Hartnett House all the children relate wonderfully with someone who is non-welfare, and in particular an artist who brings music and drama into their lives is able to cater to a very wide range of their needs. At \$15/hour for such an artist, a worthwhile programme would require not less than \$300 to reach say 10 kids.

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Janefield Training Centre, mental retardation centre, Bundoora

Janefield caters for over 470 people ranging in age from 1½-62 years. These people are all mentally retarded in the range mild to severe (they don't take profoundly retarded cases). Arts Access in 1979 funded a programme of creative dance sessions at a cost of \$3,240 for 2 semesters. The people in Janefield are described as having been imprisoned in their bodies for a number of years because of their mental retardation. Suddenly someone has asked them to be a butterfly or a crocodile, and a whole new world of freedom, interest and self-confidence has been opened up to them.

For example, Elaine, when she started coming to the dance sessions, was 30 and ponderous. She was a nuisance to others at the dance sessions, bothering them with small irritations and consistently interrupting. In fact, it seemed that nothing much could be done with her. She shuffled along and found it difficult even to lift her feet. She was much more occupied with the bits and pieces she had carried with her than in participating in the dance programme. However, over a period there was a slow improvement. She now participates, and the biggest break-through is in the fact that she pretends she is a flower, or grass in the wind. She loves a chance to express herself in this way and has become very responsive to music. A whole new world of make-belief has opened for Elaine. There has been physical improvement—she moves better, joins in enthusiastically, and is always happy to see the group arrive, and loves to talk to them.

This creative dance programme at Janefield has been continued and is now funded by the Parents Group. This illustrates the worth of a body like the Arts Access Society which is prepared to fund the experiments which when proved successful can be continued with the support of internal bodies who would have been reluctant to outlay such a large sum of money until assured of the benefits. Janefield's Parents Group has now taken on this programme, but consider St Nicholas Hospital and Kew Cottages, two other institutions for the mentally retarded, who have no such programmes because no one has been prepared to fund 'the experiments'. How might the Arts Access Society be able to help if they had a further \$3,000?

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Take the case of Debra, aged 28 years, married, with a two-year-old daughter. All she had known was an inadequate mother who was constantly bashed by Debra's father, a heavy drinker.

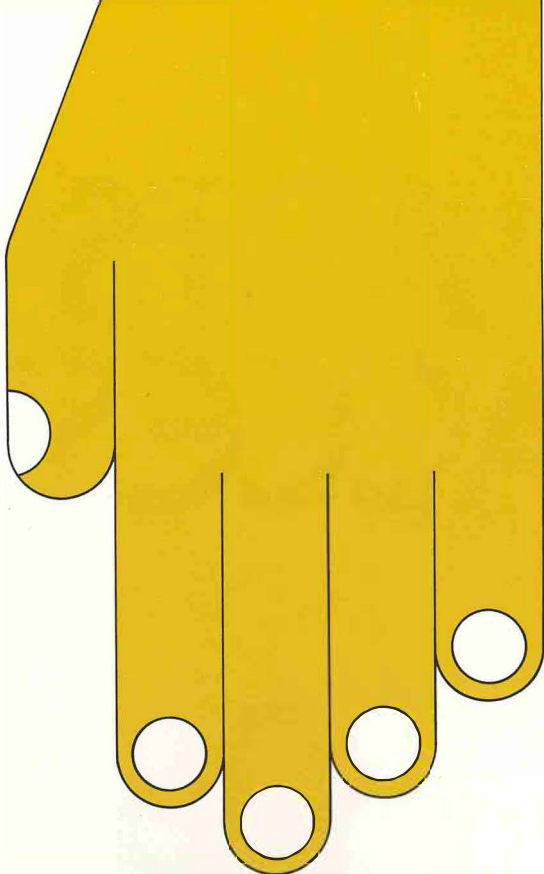
To escape this situation she married at 18. Debra worked as a process worker; and she and her husband brought home two incomes.

After a very short time, her husband began to show the same shortcomings as her father; drank heavily and was constantly violent towards her. At 26, Debra had a child, left work, thus halving their income, and because of the dependancy of her small child, became socially isolated. Her child had bronchial problems, and cried constantly. Her husband's behaviour deteriorated, his drinking habit worsened and he constantly assaulted Debra, and often their child.

Debra took an overdose—which resulted in her being admitted to a psychiatric hospital and her child taken, and put into child care.

AAS funded a creative singer guitarist to perform and involve patients at Debra's hospital. Her depression had caused her to withdraw within herself and she could not relate or communicate with her therapist. Through the musician, she found a means of self-expression—she expressed her lifelong feelings through writing and singing songs—music and the performer gave her the outlet she so desperately needed to re-establish herself towards reality.

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Arts Access was established in 1974 and received financial assistance from the Australia Council, the Myer Foundation, the R E Ross Trust, the Victorian Council of Social Service and the Victorian Arts Council. Substantial assistance in kind has been received from theatre and concert management, and from volunteers.

In 1978 programmes were interrupted because of inadequate funding. However, with a grant from the Schools Commission, Arts Access is once again organising activities for children in residential care and it is planned to broaden the financial base of the Society through support from the business sector and private contributions so that full programming may be resumed.

The interaction between the arts and welfare fields is a new and expanding field. The arts, conscious of their traditional elitist image, are looking for new audiences. On the part of the welfare community, there is a growing awareness of the therapeutic value of the arts and the contribution they can make to individuals' growth and sense of self worth.

For many people the arts resources of the community are inaccessible.

The Arts Access Society is a non-profit community arts project whose aim is to develop an outreach programme which makes cultural activities more accessible to disadvantaged groups including the handicapped, children's homes and the aged.

By using existing resources Arts Access links up health and welfare groups and the arts by enabling people in institutions to attend plays, concerts and exhibitions, and by bringing special performances and workshops into institutions and local settings.

Through Arts Access the arts are able to respond to the special needs of a wide range of groups. Arts Access recognises the therapeutic value of the arts, and the importance of the arts in stimulating social development and self-expression. Arts Access provides otherwise disadvantaged groups with the opportunity to enjoy new experiences and provides opportunity for the arts to reach new audiences.

