



Art Initiative Final Report

The Approach

Link-Up (Qld) planned to run an art initiative titled Sustaining Connections aimed at major Queensland community locations with high proportions of Stolen Generation peoples. Link-Up was to supply all canvasses, brushes and paints to the communities with the aim that artworks would be displayed in Brisbane for an exhibition in May 2011.

Board member Director, Dr. Norm Sheehan explains “The principle behind the title is a design based methodology to produce interconnecting artworks within Aboriginal communities”. He adds further, “The process of producing interconnecting artworks will represent the cultural connections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland and provide the images and words that depict and describe the significance of these connections through the theme.”

In June 2010 we started by developing a project plan, making contact with communities and the BTH workers and developing a flyer with information on the initiative that could be handed out the communities. The first major milestone was to identify Indigenous Art Facilitators in each of the communities who could build up the interest and identify participants. Link-Up (Qld) was helped by Access Arts to identify art facilitators and establish appropriate salaries for them.

We had originally planned that the BTH workers might be the ones to take on this role and some had shown to have competency in Art, though it was felt that their role would best be as co-facilitators and social and emotional wellbeing supporters of the participants.

The Communities

Selection of the communities was based on where there is high proportion of Stolen Generation peoples, a BTH worker, some interest shown and established linkages. Some of the original communities targeted ended up not being able to proceed due to not having a local BTH worker or art facilitator available or the facilitator pulling out and the last minute and being unable to attend the training workshop which was a prerequisite for delivery of the program. Other communities wanted to run both a men and women’s program so in effect had two programs going on in the one location.

The final list of communities to date has included Cairns, Yarrabah, Mareeba, Innisfail, Mt Isa, Townsville, Palm Island, Bundaberg, Mackay, Woorabinda, Rockhampton, Dalby (men and women), Cherbourg (men and women), Ipswich, West End and Logon.

The Facilitators

All the facilitators were brought down to Brisbane for a two day workshop to learn about the connective art process. This was facilitated by Norm Sheehan using his intellectual property. The facilitators were supplied with useful contacts in their area, guidelines and hints in setting up their workshops. We

supplied Art Materials, tailored forms for record keeping, consent forms and a visual Arts Diary to record the process of running the workshops.

Participants & their Pictures at the Art Facilitators Workshop 21st/22nd July 2010



Workshop Process

The two day training workshop was designed to be experiential so that so that the facilitators could go back to their community and replicate their experience.

Facilitators were asked to:

- Record the details of the participants
- Explain the consent forms and request signatures for permission to use the images of the workshops and art work
- To complete time sheets of workshop hours
- To store the design cards until digitization was completed
- To store and take care of paintings during the workshop period and until all digitization and story gathering is completed
- To Keep a Visual Art Diary.

On this later point the facilitators were asked to record the process of setting up, and running the Art Initiative workshops, this could include, the facilitators reflections, photos, new paper clippings, conversations with participants, and community agencies , as well as themes that saw emerging.

Contact with the facilitators for updates was ongoing; we have kept records for each region which has given us an understanding of each community. The knowledge we have built as given us an insight into the support they have required and the challenges they have faced. Where facilitators engaged their local shire council, other local agencies and participants there was a higher degree of success.

Summary of Workshops

Over the last seven months Link-Up have located, facilitated and supported twelve community art facilitators targeting fifteen regional areas around Queensland to engage their community in this connective art project. This project has acted as a catalyst not only reviving positive relationships between community members but also with local service providers who wanted to improve and strengthen their relationships with the community. This project was also very well supported by local churches, regional council's community centres, and other local service providers, who kindly donated space, and on occasion money for snacks.

The paintings speak for themselves. It is hard not to be moved by their honesty and soulfulness. They portray culture, spirituality, country, past trauma, joy, faith and relationships with self and community.

This final report on outcomes for each region outlined below is a collection of notes taken from the facilitators journals and where possible feedback from the participants.

Project Outcomes – Overall Insights

Qualities of a facilitator that contributes to successful workshops

We have learned a lot about what makes pulling together such an initiative work well. Not all sites have gone equally well to date and the difference appears to be influenced by the qualities of the art facilitators including the following:

- Need to be **local** and good at networking
- **Good at communicating** with a diverse group of people
- **Ability to develop relationships** with local agencies and engage them in support the project. Church, shire health centers
- **Willingness to commit** to holding regular workshops and allowing community to come with their children **being inclusive**
- **Understanding community needs, respecting culture.**
- **Passion for community projects wanting to build connections**
- Ability to **organize and liaise with all sections of the community as well LU** to achieve outcomes
- Basic knowledge of and **ability to use internet**, email etc
- **Willing to keep in touch with LU, follow guidelines** in running workshops and give **regular updates.**

It is without a doubt that many of the participants have felt profound connection to each other through this project. The opportunity to yarn and share stories has resulted in stronger community ties. In some instances the communities (Dalby, Mt Isa, Brisbane, Bundaberg, and Yarrabah) have requested further support to take them to the next stage of the project. The Dalby group in particular has continued to meet and have now registered their own community group to help their community tackle issues such as improving education on health and wellbeing and housing problems etc. Ann Lawton one of the

facilitators in Dalby has been invited to become a Link-Up Board member for that region. They also continue to connect through painting, and other creative arts to bring community together.

Overall the response from the communities involved was extremely positive. As one elder put it “this project has bought life back into our community, we have waited so long for something like this”. There was a real sense of achievement, particularly since many people had never painted before. In Brisbane the women’s group were shocked at what they produced, this gave them a thirst to learn other creative modalities. The project has had far reaching ripple effect for many people in that it has opened up possibilities that they never considered or appeared too far out of reach.

In many communities coming together progressed to an energetic change for action. For example, the men in Yarrabah asked for help to start a business selling their work so they could support their families. One of their aims was to shift long held negative perceptions of their ability to protect support and show leadership within their families and community. These small injections of art materials together with a method of connecting the art were experienced like rain after a long drought. The groups involved just soaked it up and wanted all their family and friends to be part of it. It gave many communities a sense of purpose and the feeling of empowerment they aspire to be understood for change in how they are perceived for unity, love and peace not only in their own community but with the rest of Australia.

From the perspective of the individual participant the methodology encouraged autonomy within the group whilst being a member of it. This gave the participants a sense of control and pride over their own painting, knowing that when assembled with the others it was part of a bigger picture. In a wider context it has given Individuals a lift in confidence and a sense of recognition in the wider community. Some groups have exhibited their work in galleries and have had media interviews. Other groups have been asked to speak in public forums about the works and their personal meaning.

The connective Art project has engaged over 250 people by in 14 regional areas around Queensland. In some communities we ran both men and women’s programs. We are extremely pleased with the results and hope to continue on to the next stage with more funding from the Commonwealth’s Office of the Arts.

Project Outcomes by Location

Cairns: The workshop was completed in Nov and digitization and story gathering was completed in December 2010. Cairns TAFE were happy to donate the space for the workshop, and are interested in exhibiting the works at their gallery.

Report from Facilitator Zane Saunders



“The Workshop went really well, staff and students at the Tafe enjoyed engaging in the process of drawing on cards and then painting on Canvas sharing theirs and their family stories. It gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their life stories and the effect of this event in Australia’s Aboriginal Torres Strait history.

I felt it gave a lot of positive reflection and expression .Empowering their identity and aims to reconcile what hinders the progress of accepting one’s self and others in life journey.

Examples of participant’s works

Left- “This painting s called ‘Sorrow’. It represents a mother who is broken hearted when her child had been stolen (taken away) from her”.

Right -“The people in the boat are being taken away to Palm Island. Some on the shore was left behind. To this day we still do not know some of our relatives”.



Below - *It Happened to me*

“Story about my life. It was the tail end of the Stolen Generation. The path with two footprints represent my culture and my language. The cassowary is my totem. The dugong and sting-ray represent sea. The painting represent me live with my white family, and now learning more about my Culture and language and these are taken step by step everyday”.



*Left -
Collage of
paintings -
Cairns Art
workshop*

Dalby:

Journaling Notes - Facilitator Ann Lawton

"We had a BBQ lunch and a local artist sang an original song, invited guests left and we drove straight into the workshop, and our first design patterns emerged. My observation was most of the participants got it straight away and two struggled to put anything on paper, and a great deal of encouragement was needed and the group got in on it. Overall I believe that it was a deadly day and that was expressed by all who attended with even the CEO of Goondir staying for more than 2 hours".

"Our challenge now would be to keep the participants interested, Lionel and I have decided we will take our guitars and Didg, along to every work shop, cause a lot of the Murri's enjoyed just kicking back and listening to or joining in with the music. We have a permanent meeting place the uniting church; this was sourced by Kelly from Stolen Gen".

"We had 16 participants last Friday and the local paper (Dalby Herald) was present and there is another write up in the paper today, 24th August 2010. Our paintings made the front page of the local rag today as we were invited to the flag raising Tuesday, we are all really proud".

"I was approached by the PACE program they cannot get participants, they want to do self esteem with the Community Konnextions Inc (the name our group has come up with), I am not sure this is the direction I want to go in, we are about 2 totally different types of learning, I believe the group does not want lectures and courses, what I have witnessed is they want positive experiential learning, and I am continuously looking for opportunities for this to occur".

"The Council office invited us display our art works and I was asked to explain the project.

A few of the artists were asked questions by the school children and got up and spoke about their art, it was a very nice morning. There is heaps of interest being expressed by all different sectors of the Dalby community, so it is great. I would like to wrap everything to do with this part of the project up by the end of November so we can move on, some of the works are already generating interest and the artists would also like the digitization and narration to happen as soon as possible, so they can possibly sell their works".



Photos: Dalby Art Workshops

Yarrabah: Workshops are completed with Elverina Johnson running a series of workshops at the Gindaja Drug and Alcohol Healing Centre. Digitization and story gathering was completed December 2010.

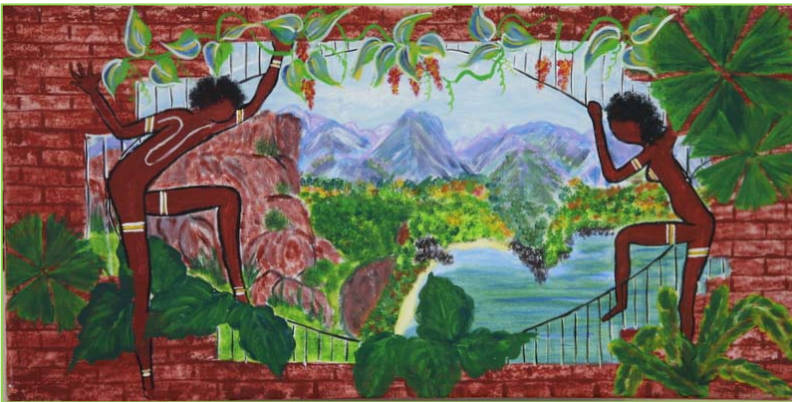
Facilitator, Elverina Johnson

“The Yarrabah community enthusiastically grasped this project and have requested more support for projects like this. I encouraged the group to meet weekly for 12 weeks. This resulted in a strong group being formed; there were young men that just turn up for a yarn and to watch. They had about fifteen people involved directly painting, three were women and the rest men aged from 6 to 55 years”.

Below: Collage of Yarrabah Paintings



Below - Paintings from Yarrabah Workshops



Poetic Essence from the men’s Group

Design Cards

- On a rock far away by the Sea
- Catch
- People Power
- Be Strong
- Sunshine
- We’re all created equal
- Our way
- Respect
- Everyone
- Faith
- Come along
- Tranquility
- Yarrie Men
- Love Peace Strength
- Bush Tucker
- Water
- Turtle
- Crocodile
- Reconciliation building bridges
- Justice, human, women, truth
- Wellbeing
- Hunter Gatherer
- Yurri Murri
- Strength Hope Wisdom
- Jesus
- Unity peace
- Kunganji Women
- Bunya Badjil
- Mountainside protects us where we live.

Mt Isa

Workshop, digitization and story gathering completed on schedule.

Sonja Clarke workshop facilitator

"The Mt Isa workshops were held at Burke Street Art Centre. It was amazing sitting together as a group and actually learning about where everyone was from, a lot of us knew each other but never actually knew any of our family back ground.

I told them just to draw whatever came to mind and think about how the images would look when we put them side by side at the end. Although the numbers changed from week to week we had an excellent time laughing and sharing tips on painting and telling stories. We had a great time participating in the workshops and would love to do it again; everyone is excited to see their work together on the banner".

Feedback from Participants

Marie Ruff

"There are a lot of people who still don't know where their family is or who they are because of the Stolen Generation, I know most of my father's side, but there are still parts of my history I don't know and by connecting with other people I might be able to find them".



Left, Painting by Marie Ruff
Below MT Isa Workshop in progress



Viv Edwards

"I'm a rainforest girl and I was told my great grandmother was from this region and may have been a Kalkadoon, but I know nothing for certain. Someone coming here to the workshop might know something about her. I hope others chasing their heritage will come along to the workshop and connect through art.

Left, Art work by Viv Edwards

Below, Mt Isa collage of Paintings



Townsville

Workshops were completed in Oct, with digitization and story gathering completed in December.
Karen Doolan Facilitator (notes from Karen's visual arts diary).

Townsville

"I found the connective art very positive; I've never done anything like it. The participants found that they started to connect with each other. Each person had their story about effects on Stolen Generation. All were different, some still angry some at peace some still hurting. They loved the project."

Below – Collage of Art works from Townsville



Palm Island

Karen Doolan our facilitator for Palm Island made several trips to Palm Island to set up a group but this proved to be very challenging.

In her journal notes She said, *“The workshop was very difficult to start, and was challenging. It was hard to find participants who were interested. I had not been there in a long time. My mother was taken there for being a half-caste. Lots of memories of her life came back. Going to Palm Island was healing for me.*

I know that there are a lot of artists there they are such a talented mob there. The people and the Island are still healing they are sick and tired of people coming over and using them for their own benefit. I think this was why it was hard for me to get people interested. I could not get people to work with me in a group, they preferred that we work individually that was more comfortable for them.

This was not working for me so I started working with students in Tafe on the mainland who were coming in from Palm Island.

I got a much better response from them, they were eager to paint, so eager that when I gave them cards all they wanted to do was paint. This group was very positive, even though lots of families are hurting from the past.

What I learnt from this project is that all our people have some thoughts and ideas in how to better our mob. We are all connected to one another, even though we don't know it”.

Collage of paintings from Palm Island residents



Ipswich

Workshops, digitization and story gathering were all completed in December.

Rhonda Collard our facilitator for Ipswich writes, *“This programme went really great with the people who took part in it. They told me they enjoyed coming together as Aboriginal People to connect through art. I was able to share and pass on Dreamtime stories, songs dance and language. This is our true way.*

WE listened to each other’s stories sharing laughs and tears. Because of this we all had a connection on an emotional and strong spiritual level. We became very close. The feeling of belonging is everything. This is because it’s Stolen Generation; you don’t know where you belong, who you belong to or where you fit. These feelings never end.

For me this was a healing journey. It was wonderful to see the Aboriginal spirits in the participants become stronger and stronger. I witnessed see them embracing their true self and their Aboriginality. It was such a powerful change and what an honour to witness”.

Feedback from participant -Nathan Wanmala Alfons Boschman.

“My name is Nathan Wanmala Alfons Boschman. I am a Yamatji Young man from Mullewah, a town in WA. My father is a Yumatji man who is part of the Stolen Generation.

I enjoyed participating in this project with Nana Rhonda and other participants. Learning more about the different techniques and designs has been interesting and will assist in my studies at school. Most importantly, this experience has connected me to family and Indigenous people. I have been able to learn some language words from my own country and sing songs and listen to stories with my nana.

This is very important for the son and the grandson of the Stolen Generation family to connect to be able to feel a sense of where I can go. I got a lot of knowledge from hearing from others I learnt to draw different animals, foot prints and signs that our ancestors used”.

Below, Collage of paintings from Ipswich



Rockhampton & Woorabinda:

Workshops, digitization and story gathering completed in December.

Darcy Bolton facilitator for the two regions writes, "The council was very supportive of the workshop and wanted take the opportunity to promote community in a positive way, after so many negative media reports.

The workshops were a stop start affair with participants coming and going on a regular basis. In all it was very hard to get participants to stay and commit whilst respecting cultural protocols of the people in the community. The overall feedback was very positive and they saw it as a new way to work together in the community".



Bundaberg: Workshops were delayed until late November, but the participants were keen to finish on schedule. Digitisation and story gathering was completed earlier this month.

Marleane Johnson our facilitator said *“The participants were very happy with the results; the participants chose an outdoor location to meet and to work together. They discussed how they might incorporate something symbolic from their country that would connect all the canvases together. Each participant painted their own design with a part of the quinoa tree on some part of their painting”*.



Brisbane: Digitisation and story gathering not yet completed due to time restrictions in Dec and Jan. This process will be completed by the end of Feb.

After the initial large workshop in Brisbane a small group of women formed a group that met on a weekly basis. The painting became less of a focus to having an opportunity to yarn and support each other in their daily life experiences. In a recent meeting they expressed their trust in each other and the feeling of feeling safe to talk about their past traumas. As a result Link-Up has made the counselling space available to them for their support group. They are also interested in pursuing other arts and crafts projects.



Cherbourg: This has been the most difficult community to build a sense of community interest in the workshops. We had funded for a women's and men's workshop to take place. We were told that people in the community wanted to be paid to participate in the workshops and therefore they couldn't get much interest. Link-Up caseworker Matthew Malone went to see both facilitators and they had varying understanding of what was expected from them. Unfortunately neither facilitator recorded their process, but during digitization and story gathering process we were able to conduct an interview. The facilitator became disheartened at not being able to engage participants and began painting with one person who was interested. Together they painted 15 canvases. The Facilitator for the women also complained of lack of interest unless there was monetary reward and did not pursue with any workshops. Material for the workshops were then returned to Link-Up.



Above - Paintings from Cherbourg

Mackay: We have had some delays with getting the BTH workers who showed initial interest to follow through. Unfortunately our attempts engage a facilitator was hampered by this lack of follow through from local agencies Mackay.

Mareeba and Innisfail:

Facilitator Fiona Tongs for these two regions cancelled a visit from our digitization team due to illness. We have no photographs of any works from these regions. Workshops in Innisfail have been completed and she plans to continue to work with participants in the Mareeba region.