



Dambai Dancers and the Dany Women's Group at the Armchair Travel Day, 2003.

Another cultural process undertaken at Braybrook and Maidstone has produced a mural on the back walls of the Braybrook Community Centre. The mural, painted by local street artists supported by artswoker Amanda Neville, is a bold statement which, since its creation, has never been tagged. After all, it belongs to the resident youth and is therefore considered sacrosanct.

The mural is adjacent to a barren expanse from which one can see the distant high rise towers of Melbourne. In 2005 this ground will become a Neighbourhood Garden designed, sculpted and cared for by local residents. It will be used for individual garden plots, performances and visual arts installations. Overall the projects at Braybrook and Maidstone signify that community cultural development and Neighbourhood Renewal do share a number of common elements; amongst them the desire to create vibrant places where people want to live.

## Long Gully and Eaglehawk

The public housing estates in the Bendigo suburbs of Long Gully and Eaglehawk are one hundred and thirty-seven kilometres from Melbourne. The residents are predominantly Anglo-Celtic in background. Many of them have lived at Long Gully or Eaglehawk for a long time. St. Luke's Anglicare, a welfare agency based in Bendigo, is a main provider of services. Linda Beilharz is Director of the Community Capacity Building and Research Unit at St. Luke's. In her book *Building Community – The Shared Action Experience* she writes that Long Gully has high numbers of interventions by police, juvenile justice, child protection, drug and alcohol services, and is an area where significant resources have been withdrawn over the past few years including a primary school and a kindergarten.

*Building Community – The Shared Action Experience* is a study of a three-year community development project which ran from 1997 to 2000. **Shared Action** emphasised people's ability to be their own agents of change by creating conditions that enable them to control and direct the process of change. **Shared Action** also seems to have been based at times on the use of pre-existing social rituals.

In essence strengths-based practice:

- is an approach to people which is primarily dependent upon positive attitudes to people's dignity, capacities, rights, uniqueness and commonalities
- emphasises people's ability to be their own agents of change by creating conditions that enable them to control and direct the process of change
- creates conditions that enable people to identify and mobilise their strengths and capacities in the process of change
- provides resources in a way that complements people's existing strengths and resources as opposed to compensating for deficits
- acknowledges and addresses power imbalances between workers and those they work with
- seeks to identify and address social, personal, cultural and structural constraints to people's growth and liberation
- recognises and acts to address dynamics inherent in organisation and social practices and structures that are incongruent with strengths-based principles and processes

W. McCashen, cited in *Building Community – The Shared Action Experience*, Linda Beilharz, Solutions Press, 2002

Every so often, we as teachers are presented with an opportunity to witness students' work which can only be described as *very special*. **The Theatre of Transformation** is one such event. The students involved have created a series of incredibly powerful scenarios and themes and combined them to present a show which is confronting, challenging and so realistic. The opportunity is not one to be missed ...

John Pearce, Eaglehawk Secondary College, Student Welfare Coordinator, *Promoting Harmony Project* report.

During the project the residents of Long Gully organised a schools program and a family recreational park (*Chum Reserve*) was built of colourful mosaic pavers and other ceramic installations.

After **Shared Action** concluded, Linda Beilharz and project worker Jenny Hogan held a planning day with residents from Long Gully and Eaglehawk. The community members nominated domestic violence, teenage hoon behaviour and disputes between neighbours as important issues. These can be explosive issues in people's day-to-day lives. The residents advocated long-term community capacity building via social harmony rather than confrontation.

The resulting **Promoting Harmony Project** was organised by St. Luke's with a specifically cultural basis. The aim was to heighten residents' awareness of strengths in their community and ways in which they might make their neighbourhoods more harmonious places in which to live.

**Theatre of Transformation**, the first of the two major cultural products of the **Promoting Harmony** process, was the result of facilitator/director Bryan Derrick's work with eighteen Year Ten students at the Eaglehawk Secondary College. The teenagers underwent an intensive five-day workshop and rehearsal of material based on real-life stories and issues relevant to their target audience.

Bryan Derrick used techniques devised by Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal in his *Theatre Of The Oppressed*. After the performances, members of the audience could suggest alternative courses of action in the scenarios presented. The scenario would then be re-staged with audience members encouraged to come on stage and play roles. Further alternative scenarios would then be discussed and possibly acted out. **Theatre of Transformation** was performed three times at the Eaglehawk Secondary College and then at the Star Cinema in the Eaglehawk Town Hall.

The second product of **Promoting Harmony** was the short film **The Dirt on Squir**t. More than sixty students and older residents of Eaglehawk and Long Gully collaborated with writer and director Kirk Robson in



Video still *Dirt on Squir*t.

### Who says you need Hollywood to make a movie?

Cindy Lethlean, member of the Community Reference Group, and Jenny Hogan, from the St Luke's Community Capacity Building Unit, have turned film producers and directors.

The picture's called *The Dirt on Squirt*, and was made with the kids and community of Long Gully and Eaglehawk.

Cindy says she became involved through a Neighbourhood Renewal program. "A flyer was put into (our) hands, and it said *you have talented children, bring them along*. So we took our talented children along, and our talented children got a bit of a back seat, actually, because we all got involved."

The plot of the film is about a gang of feral children, including Squirt, growing up in a housing area in the fictional "Eagle Gully", with a difficult family life. "Hopefully, we've focused on the positive decision making," Cindy says.

Over 60 local community people were involved in the project, and the aim was for realism. Cindy says that, besides getting locals involved on screen and behind the camera, they also spent a lot of time talking to locals about the script.

Local video producer, Adam Cornish, also got involved, producing a *behind the scenes* documentary about the making of the film.

The diversity of cast and crew has been a real positive, Jenny says. "Just working together on the film, and getting to know [the] amazing skills that young people hold, and that older people hold in the community's come through really strongly in the themes within the film".

"And the mentoring - the possibilities that, if you work together, it's amazing what you can achieve in a community."

the making of the film. A Community Reference Group had been set up for the *Promoting Harmony Project* with Linda Hogan as project officer but the sessions in which Kirk Robson constantly re-presented the script for community consultation were open to all. The final sessions revealed some disquiet as *The Dirt on Squirt* is a hard-edged look at peer-group pressure and the need to decide things for yourself.

The narrative is about a boy, Squirt, who wishes to enter a bike race. A gang of other boys throw Squirt's bike into the lake after he beats one of them in a preparatory race. His bike is retrieved by a neighbour after Squirt, of his own volition, returns some money he has stolen. Squirt thus gets to ride in the race. Sub-plots are about his father's theft of a car-part from a wrecker's yard and his sister's pregnancy. However the film is neither dour nor earnest: the kids and adults are wonderful, performing with an almost palpable pride and honesty.

St. Luke's, with its Community Capacity Building and Research Unit, has become a partner organisation in the Department of Human Services Neighbourhood Renewal program at Long Gully and East Eaglehawk.

ABC Radio, Central Victoria, 24th September, 2000

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