



Quantam Project participants at ACMI *Digital Storytelling*.

Morwell East, Moe Heights, Glendonald, Churchill and Traralgon East

The Latrobe Valley, a hundred and eighty kilometres to the east of Melbourne, contains the broad-acre housing estates of Morwell East, Moe Heights, Glendonald, Churchill and Traralgon East: all sites of Neighbourhood Renewal. Quantum Support Services, formed in 2001 through an amalgamation of community agencies, provides housing and community support services across the Gippsland region.

Within Quantum, Leanne Blake is a project worker for Neighbourhood Renewal. She works across all four estates supporting resident groups and community projects. Grant McNeill is responsible for the Public Housing Advocacy Program, the Personal Support Program for the unemployed, the Community Connections Program for people in low-cost accommodation and, amongst other things, Neighbourhood Renewal.

McNeill, like a number of other community development workers, has a long association with community arts. In his case this began in the early 1980's with *arc Yinnar*, a still-surviving artist-run venue. It incorporates a gallery, artists workshops, a retail outlet and a performance space in a renovated dairy factory.

Digital story-telling has been one of the three cultural projects facilitated by Quantum Support Services over the past twelve months. It was first suggested by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit in Melbourne and organised in partnership with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image. The latter has an on-going **Memory and Place** program through which the public can, with professional assistance and tuition, digitally record personal photographs and life experiences.

Quantum successfully developed a **Houses, Homes and Neighbourhoods** theme within the **Memory and Place** program and took eight Latrobe Valley residents to Melbourne to complete their projects. An intensive three day course with multi-media specialists resulted in the residents story-boarding and writing their own scripts before recording voice-over narratives to accompany images from their personal archives. Their contributions to a national treasure house of memories is available at the website of the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, <http://www.acmi.net.au>

take a walk with my son and meet the world
Created by Roderick Marks

"This is a story about my son Tyler and by taking a walk with my son you meet his community. Tyler is the product of the union of two families from the north and south of the mighty Murra (Murray River). Tyler is born and bred in Gippsland."

How did you find the workshop experience?
"For years I've been telling people to express themselves. My kids and their friends are infinitely possessed with the ways and means of showing how they see life. This medium has taken a spark and started a fire. When the show's over, go outside and meet your neighbours."

These were kids who weren't especially well-behaved. What they learnt was music, yes, but more than just musical skills. People don't stop to think about what a musical program can mean to such kids. If they were to get to a good performance level – and they did – then they had to pick up organisational and social skills as well as strict self-discipline. The project encompasses more than a dozen kids just banging on drums. One kid mucking up for a second can spoil the whole effect. The discipline has to be very strict. You sit and you don't as much as make a sound until it's your turn, it's time to do what you've been practicing to do with the others. And they did it very well. The parents just doted. The pride on their faces when they watched what their kids could do – no amount of money can buy it.

Leanne Blake and Grant McNeill, interview, 2004

Quantum's second arts project in partnership with Neighbourhood Renewal began when adult residents from Morwell East told Quantum they wanted their kids to learn music but that they could afford neither lessons nor instruments. Steve Schultz, a percussionist, composer and conductor agreed to work for a term with the kids, after school hours, at their primary school.

One can only admire Steve Schultz's courage. The kids selected and encouraged to beat his drums were not well-known for being particularly amenable to discipline. Yet twelve weeks later the group performed three especially composed works in a concert for the school and went on to play at the second anniversary celebrations of Neighbourhood Renewal.

The third project, again with Neighbourhood Renewal, is a fine example of how a cultural activity can grow if it is based on a real community need and if community workers bring their skills and contacts to nurture the project with residents. *The Moe Next Wave Festival Project* was given its initial impetus by the residents of Moe Heights. At a meeting with Quantum in 2003, the community voiced its concern about the ill-lit and grotty Wirraway Street underpass below the freeway to Melbourne. They were also keen to see young people involved in doing something.

Lynette Raven of the Latrobe City Council suggested an involvement with the Next Wave Festival. The festival, a celebration of young people and emerging artists, is based in Melbourne but was looking for regional partners in disadvantaged areas. So, one thing led to another and ...

The Moe Next Wave Festival Project has seen the approaches and twenty-four pillars of Wirraway Street underpass repainted in a vibrantly colourful design by multi-media artist Ben Walker and a group of young participants. A new lighting system, complementing the colours, has been installed. Ben Walker and the group of young people have also made four short films that premiered at the launch of the Next Wave Festival in Melbourne's Federation Square in May 2004.

The Wirraway Street underpass Next Wave project, during the transformation.



Beautifying the underpass was one of our top priorities for the Moe Heights Residents Group. And when it happened, it made a hundred per cent difference. A dirty black hole was turned into a very wonderful area. The kids loved doing it. One of them was so excited, she couldn't talk sense for a whole day. All of them had such a strong sense of achievement, it was so important to them. And when they went to Melbourne for the Next Wave Festival, I was amongst those who went with them. We were so proud of them, you couldn't be more proud.

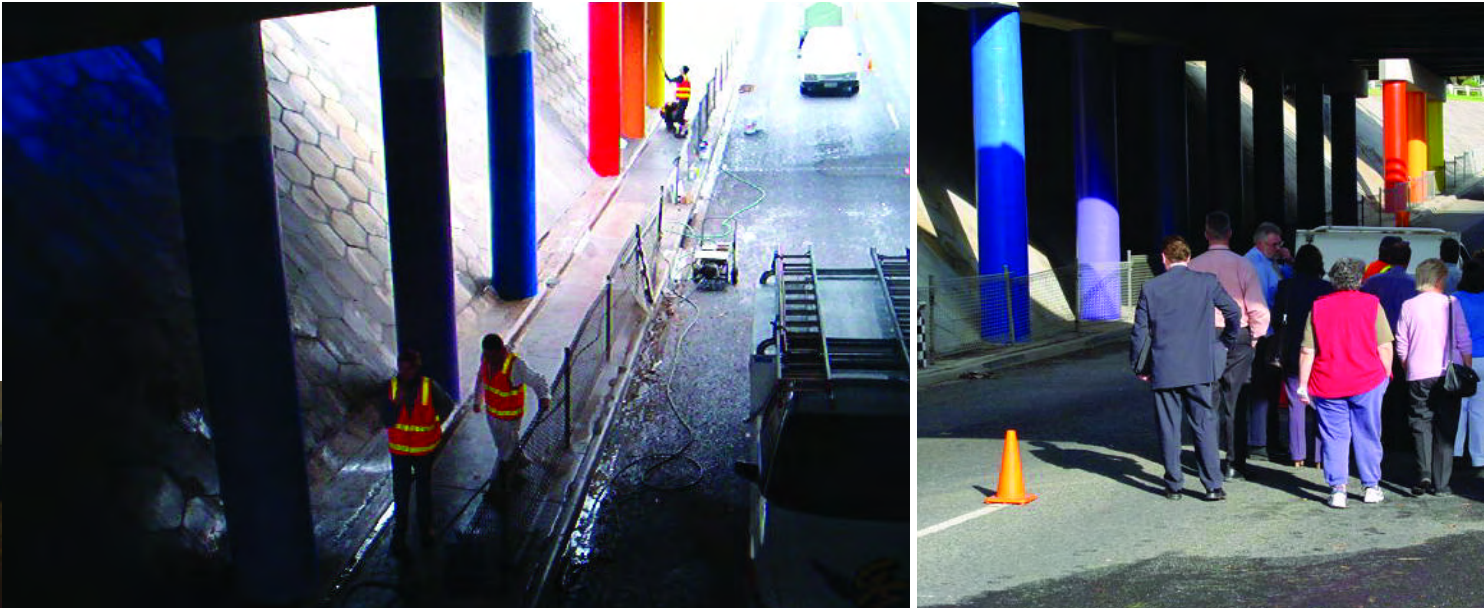
Fay Needham, Moe Heights Residents Group interview

The beautiful thing about the Moe project was that it pulled in a whole range of people and groups who had previously not worked together to achieve this amazing outcome for the community. Government, business people and residents worked together to pull off this great show. Local businesses sponsored items such as paints and the word is that contractors put in more time than they charged for services. Even the local opportunity shop donated some curtains to make the launch-night venue look better. Naturally we returned these the next day so they could still sell them!

The community spirit was great. Passing cars would toot their horns as they passed while the underpass works were in progress. A great sense of pride developed amongst the community. One of my favourite memories was at the end of the night was when one of the young girls involved in the production of the videos called out to her friends. I am so happy. I think I am on a natural high!

Lynette Raven, Arts Innovation Facilitator, Latrobe City.

Communities, neglected, don't automatically spring into collective and immediate action when finally given the chance to contribute to their own environment. But arts projects, about which some organisations are at times disinterested or sceptical, are both a great community activity and a way to hasten the process of community involvement and empowerment. Grant McNeill, Quantum, interview



We were sick and tired of looking at the old underpass so we decided something had to be done about it. The artist, a local, came back from Melbourne just to work on it with about a dozen teenagers from around here. And those kids, they were absolutely rapt with what they achieved. That's a good thing about art, as long as it's done properly. The sense of achievement at having done something really good.

Helen Wilson, member of the Moe Heights Residents Group, interview