



Eumemmerring Youth performing at *The Torch Project*



Aunty Vicki
at launch of
The Torch Project.



South Sudanese Group
performing at
The Torch Project.



Neighbour hood Renewal will ...

- Empower local communities to shape their own futures.
- Develop a shared vision for neighbourhoods through local Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans. To achieve this vision, the efforts of the whole of Government will be co-ordinated around people and the places they live, work and play .
- Create vibrant places where people want to live.

Excerpt from the Department of Human Services, website
<http://www.neighbourhoodrenewal.vic.gov.au/ooh/web/nrwsite.nsf>



Rehearsal of *The Torch Project*

Doveton and Eumemmerring and The Torch Project

The housing estates at Doveton and Eumemmerring were built in the 1950's, mainly for Australian-born and immigrant production workers in the expanding City of Dandenong. Many of the houses have since been sold, often to their occupiers, but fourteen per cent remain government-owned and the area retains a rich cultural diversity. The Department of Human Services has contracted an arts company called *The Torch Project* to help facilitate Neighbourhood Renewal on the estates.

Our Filipino dancers performed our native dance Ifugao, a dance of the aborigines of the Northern Philippines. We felt it was appropriate to share the spirit of our native land with the aboriginal people of Australia that night. During breaks between each dance group, I was one of the actors who acted out social issues and difficulties faced by migrant groups.

Being part of the *Idol Quest* performance was also an opportunity for me to connect with my new community and to feel part of the bigger family of Doveton. As a new resident, I don't know many people except for my neighbours. I now appreciate afresh the people in my neighbourhood.

I meet new friends from the cast and we greet each other when I meet them in the shopping strip at Autumn Place. Finally, I really feel I belong to this community because of that experience. It's like magic.

Norminda Villanueva, *Idol Quest* participant and Settlement Officer for the Centre for Philippine Concerns, Australia Incorporated, *interview*

Steve Payne, Company Director of The Torch Project believes that community cultural development re-ignites communities, reconnecting people to all they can achieve. Artistic Director Kirk Robson emphasises the importance of people imagining who they could be in their community and discovering their power. Community celebration of the multicultural nature of Doveton and Eumemmerring is a key part of cross-cultural communication and understanding. In 2004, The Torch Project organised *Idol Quest*, an extravaganza of dance with eighty-five performers from backgrounds as varied as The Philippines, Samoa, Tonga, Maori New Zealand, South Sudan, Hungary and indigenous Australia.

The Torch Project has a long history of working with housing estate residents. The company began when it developed the script for *The Torch* at the Atherton Gardens estate in 1999. This play was re-staged a number of times and went through a series of fundamental changes after this but always retained the

dramatic structure of song, dialogue and direct speech to the audience created by its original writer and director Stefo Nantsou. The subject matter also remained inter-cultural difference and the understanding of difference. The productions at the Universal Theatre (1999) and at the Melbourne Town Hall (2000) contained a cast of six professional actors and thirty-nine community members, who between them spoke thirty languages.

After 2000, *The Torch* toured Victoria, often changing to reflect the concerns of different communities with whom The Torch Project rewrote and performed the script. In 2003 an entirely new play, *The Bridge*, was produced with communities in northern Victoria. *The Bridge* then came to Melbourne for a sold-out season at Melbourne's Trades Hall Theatre.

Congratulations must go to the following: the Ballam Ballam Dance Group; Bunjil Aboriginal Culture and Dance Club; the d'Silangan dancers Philippine-Australian Cultural Group; Samoan Dance Group; South Sudanese Group, representing the Nuer community; and the Maori Dance Group, Nga Tamariki O Nga Hapu Katoa, which means *children of the four winds*.

Those groups thoroughly entertained the crowd and gave everyone in attendance a great insight into the various cultures that exist in our local community.

I also acknowledge the great performers who took part in the short plays during the night. All of them are residents in the Doveton-Eumemmerring area. The performances were a great representation of everyday life for many local people and the hardships and pressures they often face. I would once again like to congratulate everyone involved in organising and participating in this event. The evening was a great credit to the local community and those working within it.

Adem Somyurek, MP, Member for Eumemmerring, statement to Legislative Assembly