



NEWSLETTER 011 · SEPTEMBER 2010

## ACT OUT NEWS

**ACT OUT IN BROOME** – We are heading up to Broome in late October for work with young women from the Derby community. This is part of a Anglicare/Kinway initiative in association with the Marnin Bowa Dumbara Aboriginal Corporation.

**CREATIVE COMMUNITIES II CONFERENCE 21 – 23 Sept** Held once again in Surfers' Paradise, the conference brought together scholars and practitioners from around Australia and the world. Thank you to everyone from Griffith University's Centre for Cultural Research.

Dr Peter Wright and I represented Murdoch University. Details of my paper will be @ [www.actout.com.au/blog](http://www.actout.com.au/blog)

## To be or not to be – depends on funding & allies

For the last five weeks Act Out has been running a program with young women at **Rangeview Juvenile Remand Centre**. Over the last three years we have also conducted a number of one-off workshops at Banksia Hill Detention Centre with young men.

The program is using Boal's participatory theatre games and techniques to engage the young women in a playful exploration of their lives as they are and the future they face. It aims at having a positive transformative impact that will result in greater self-awareness and resilience, as well as confidence and self-esteem.



Theatre in prison settings is not new. There are theatre programs of some form or other in prisons and remand centres throughout the world. Their success appears to go hand in hand with the perseverance and commitment of the main organiser and the level to which the institution involved supports or hinders the program.

Here are two programs that really capture my attention as a result of the positive impact they have had.

**Dr Rob Pensalfini**, artistic director of The Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble and lecturer at Queensland University, has now created three Shakespeare shows with inmates from Bollaron Correctional Centre. Inspired by the success of Shakespeare performances in US prisons, he directed *The Tempest* in 2006, *Julius Caesar* last year and, *Macbeth*, this year.

Being part of a study of the characters and the performance of a play aids participants with issues of

rehabilitation and literacy.

It also '...helps prisoners become more skilled at managing their emotions, and then more able to make a positive contribution to the community when they are released,' says Dr. Pensalfini.

**Blagg!**, a program created by TiPP in Manchester University, [www.tipp.org.uk](http://www.tipp.org.uk), involves a series of workshops during which the inmates create the fictional character Jo Blaggs. Inmates create her life story including her offence, the people and the social environment that influence her. In the form of theatre games and activities, the group explores the offence, its effect on the characters, including the victims, and what her future looks like. Jo Blagg is everyone and no one in the workshop, allowing for both safety and engagement.

Recidivism reduction programs have four main objectives: **reducing** anti-social attitudes, **increasing** affection towards family and identification with pro-social role models, **replacing** anti-social with pro-social alternatives, and, **analysing** legal/illegal behaviour through rehearsal of situations.

Formaat, a theatre company in Holland, evaluated their use of Blagg! in two female prisons and credit the success to offenders playing an active role in exploring, analysing, problem-solving and rehearsing the different stages of offending and rehabilitation. **In effect, theatre meets the objectives of recidivism reduction perfectly!** Formaat have a fascinating and comprehensive report available from their website: [www.formaat.org](http://www.formaat.org).

The benefits of using theatre to work with offenders are well-documented and evidenced; however, there is still resistance in supporting theatre programs in the long term in correctional settings in Australia. Why, I wonder?

Finally, here is a clip of a recent publication on theatre in prisons by Jonathan Shailor, a colleague in the US: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLni3Y4i4sk>

## Creativity and Innovation in Health

1. At the recent Creative Communities conference in Queensland, Margret Meagher, the founder of the Arts and Health Organisation, presented a paper outlining the benefits of using arts in the healing professions. After a little research I was delighted to find that this is an area of huge growth, as government departments and organisations have begun to fervently embrace the use of arts-based practices, like theatre, in health practices.

This extends, according to Meagher and her colleague, Gene D. Cohen, to the area of Creativity and Aging. See [www.creativeaging.org](http://www.creativeaging.org)



Meagher is also the convenor of the 2010 International Arts and Health Conference being held again this year in Melbourne, 16 – 19 November. [www.artsandhealth.org](http://www.artsandhealth.org)

2. In a Whole New Mind, Dan Pink, describes the trend in medical schools establishing programs that incorporate acting and visual arts to hone in on doctors' sensitivities when dealing with patients. The examples include doctors at UCLA Medical School staying overnight in hospitals acting being patients in order to develop empathy for the people they treat. Similarly, through the study of paintings, doctors at Yale School of Medicine become more adept at noticing details in patients' conditions.

3. An article in September's Harvard Business Review describes the work of Kaiser Permanente's Innovation Consultancy Team. The team was set up in a commitment to spread a culture of innovation in the area of service through using IDEO's concept of 'human-centred design', based on simply observing staff in action.

To date they have a number of successful projects to showcase. The first is MedRite – an initiative to reduce medication errors which has saved the health company almost 1m, as well as increasing both patient safety and physician peace of mind. The Nurse Knowledge Exchange features the involvement of patients and new software in reducing both the time and the accuracy of the between-shifts patient information exchange. Both innovations were simple and cost-effective. Read more soon @ [www.erikajacobson.com.au](http://www.erikajacobson.com.au)



## STICK TRICK! Small innovations



After the conference I spent a day wondering around Brisbane as it wrapped up its Annual Arts Festival. But it wasn't the famed Valentino exhibition at the Gallery of Modern Art, or the wonderful installations and talented performers that engaged me the most – it was a simple little stick hanging outside a fruit salad stall in the evening markets on the banks of the Brisbane River.

Voytek, originally from Poland, has a most innovative way of attracting customers. He has hung a cloth with button holes which have a small stick looped through them with a string. The stick is slightly too long to just slip back through the string so the trick is to undo it.

As I attempted to undo it he assured me there was a way and he would happily disclose it for two dollars. An hour later as I paid my two bucks (which he smilingly put into a jar laden with gold coins) he humbly repeated that he was not the creator of the trick. Maybe not, but he employs it in a most innovative way.



He attracts customers who buy fruit salad, has them hanging around making the stall look popular and he charges for the solution!!

The trick, of course, is to work with the soft materials, the string and the cloth NOT the stick, which is what most people do – it is an exercise in parallel thinking as well as, I think, small scale marketing and entrepreneurial genius.

Act Out – Theatre for Transformation

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