

# THE TORCH PROJECT

## RE-IGNITING THE COMMUNITY

Re-igniting the Community is a unique community cultural development project using the arts as a catalyst for inspiring people to grapple with issues of history, culture, identity and belonging. The project worked with local groups and project partners to help communities give a voice to critical local issues and develop local strategies to deal with them.

It enabled community individuals and groups from all corners of life, to express in a safe, non-threatening and supportive environment, issues which may otherwise not be expressed. It also helped to raise social awareness within our local and regional areas to become a vehicle for social understanding and a catalyst for action and change.

The aims of the project were to - develop a locally written performance script with community input; create a quality, provocative and entertaining piece of theatre; challenge prejudices; emotionally inspire and to continue to develop justice within our society.

The project evolved through community discussion and drama workshops towards a final, theatrical performance, 'The Torch'. Local acting and musical talent, much of it untapped, was used for the performance.

The writers fictionalised the story from actual events and personal experiences to create a generic, Victorian country coastal town that everyone could recognise. Young people were the primary focus of the story because they are the future, yet they face serious and complex issues growing up in rural towns today, such as - drugs, racism, unemployment, family and societal breakdown.

The writers hoped the script would become a fluid creation, to be used by anyone as a skeleton draft, and be adapted to more accurately reflect a specific area or community, in years to come.

There was much historically specific information the writers felt was impossible to include:

- The Eumeralla Wars in the Portland and Heywood district which saw warriors from tribes across Australia come to help the local Gunditjmara people defend themselves against the European invasion.
- The complex histories of the Framlingham, Lake Condah and Lake Tyers missions, tragic yet inspiring, in terms of the tenacious survival and triumph of the spirit of the people who survived them.
- The Warragul Creek massacres, the Milly Creek massacre, the Pyramids massacre, Butcher's Creek, Swift's Creek, Mt Emu Creek - in the nineteenth century our waterways, once full of fish and eels, ran with the blood of aboriginal people. In less than fifteen years, it is estimated that over two thousand Kurnai people were reduced to less than 126.

A Community Arts Project such as 'The Torch' exemplifies the power of community building and the positive outcomes obtainable within such an arts project.

A project which brings together a united community and exposes the needs, desires and dreams, past, present and future can only be a positive thing for the health and well-being of that community. Community Connections (Vic) Ltd is acutely aware of the issues surrounding the many and varied needs within our local and regional communities and also the lack of voice small minority groups have.

The Agency is proud to be one of the key supporters of 'The Torch' Project.

