# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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DOING ARTS WORKSHOPS AND RESEARCH

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WHAT WE FOUND OUT

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Gaining trust
Being responsive
Providing resources and expertise
Making connections in the community
Collaboration: Connecting agencies
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SUMMARY AND POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

Meanings and processes of community empowerment
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In 2006 CAN WA established and opened the Kellerberrin Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development Unit (KIACDU) with the Indigenous community. The Unit was identified as the most effective way to support Indigenous arts and cultural development, in a way that was self-determined by and empowering for the Indigenous community.

The aim of this research was to explore the meaning of community empowerment, particularly in relation to working with the Indigenous community;

- the role of arts and cultural practice in supporting community empowerment; and
- how non-Indigenous organisations can best support Indigenous community empowerment.

Kellerberrin is about 200 kilometres east of Perth and has a population of 1180, of which 10 per cent are Indigenous. Initial research into where such a Unit should be established identified the Wheatbelt as a region where there was a lack of sustainable cultural services and infrastructure, but that Kellerberrin, in particular, had a strong potential for arts and cultural development. There was also a history of strong Indigenous organisations operating in the community including the Kellerberrin Aboriginal Progress Association (KAPA) and the Yok Yoruk women’s group.
DOING ARTS WORKSHOPS AND RESEARCH

The research was designed around three art and story-telling workshops held in the community, which focused on what Kellerberrin meant to people living there. Art or stories produced within these workshops were used as a basis for interviews conducted with workshop participants. The interview questions asked about peoples’ history and connection to Kellerberrin, the establishment of KIACDU in their community and their ideas about the future of KIACDU. The researchers also observed the workshops, and other events, such as the Badjaling Cultural Festival, the NAIDOC ball and KIACDU launch.

CAN WA staff involved in the work being done in Kellerberrin were also interviewed. Similarly they were asked about their history and role in CAN WA and about their experience of working in Kellerberrin broadly and with the Indigenous community specifically.

The aim of the analysis was to clarify perceptions of KIACDU’s role in community empowerment and describe people’s lived experiences and perceptions of the process of empowerment through art and cultural practice. By doing this we sought to gain a sense of the perceived effect CAN WA has had on the Kellerberrin community.

WHAT WE FOUND OUT

The findings are divided into three themes:
1. processes of community empowerment;
2. community empowerment outcomes of arts and cultural practice; and the
3. partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders in this context.

Processes of community empowerment

Community empowerment is explicitly aimed at social, institutional and political changes in a community through people’s participation and aimed at improving the quality of life for communities and reducing inequalities of power and poverty. Community empowerment is also subjective and constructed through individual and collective local beliefs and ‘truths’. Different operational domains or processes of empowerment were discussed.

• Gaining trust

Addressing people’s mistrust is important to getting people involved in community projects, particularly given the sporadic and short term nature of many community building initiatives. There are numerous ways of tackling mistrust; however, the approach that stood out the most in the case of Kellerberrin was the employment of local people.

• Being responsive

Participation also relies on community development workers to be aware and sensitive to different institutional, cultural and socio-historical contexts. Responsiveness requires staff to be flexible, patient and persistent, particularly unique qualities for an organisation also dealing with the timelines and demands of funding bodies. The level of responsiveness from CAN WA staff was highlighted by Indigenous community members who spoke of the KIACDU being a place where they felt they belonged and could have their needs met.

• Providing resources and expertise

CAN WA, as is often required by external agencies, provided resources and skills central to the empowerment processes. While this was very much appreciated by the community, CAN WA was aware that expertise within the community also needs to be nurtured. This balance was achieved through the support CAN WA gave, and advice it received from, Yok Yoruk and KAPA.

• Collaboration: Connecting agencies

Another level of connection is the collaboration between the local community and those who control funding or resources. CAN WA have worked consistently at developing a strong collaborative relationship with KAPA and Yok Yoruk.

• Letting go

The need to develop collaborative relationships comes with the need for the external agency to let go. The desire for more control over the project grows in the community, and in this case, amongst local Indigenous CAN WA staff, and staff from the outside the community are required to pass over that power. As well as this organic developmental change, CAN WA has also adopted a strategic approach to letting go. It is about two years of working with the Kellerberrin community and CAN WA has started to discuss succession plans for the KIACDU, which may place an organisation like KAPA in control.

• Making connections in the community

Many of the people who were living or had lived in Kellerberrin spoke about the tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups in Kellerberrin. As an external agency, CAN WA worked with the community to try and create connections and link Indigenous people with non-Indigenous people and organisations in Kellerberrin, through different workshops and events.
Empowerment outcomes through arts and culture

Art and cultural development projects have been used in many countries to achieve different social outcomes, including building social capital and supporting the growth of informal associations to social enterprises. Although it is still early days for KIACDU, there is evidence of social outcomes described below.

- Acquiring new skills
  The value of organising events or activities extends beyond the actual event or activity. It provides skills related to organising and managing complex projects, attracting a good attendance and earning income. The evidence for whether the workshops and other CAN WA activities will meet the hopes expressed above is still developing. However, the NAIDOC ball held in 2007, which was initiated and organised by the Indigenous community, is an example of people accessing the skills they have developed.

- Having fun
  Amongst the social outcomes of arts and cultural development many researchers highlight the simple outcomes of having fun and celebrating what you achieve. Again the NAIDOC ball and the excursions organised through KIACDU are examples of the excitement and hope that comes with art and cultural development activities.

- Healing through sharing
  The literature highlighted the way in which art and cultural practice can commemorate and make visible silenced memories and stories about life in communities, as well as deconstructing stories that work to exclude particular groups. The opportunities to share stories created by CAN WA was emphasised by Indigenous community members as an important part of their healing process.

- Addressing social issues
  Rather than taking remedial action on problems, community arts practice has the potential to address problems by focusing on community assets, aspects of life cherished by a community, and working towards a shared vision in the community. This contribution from the arts and cultural development for Indigenous people in Kellerberrin was made clear in relation to alcohol misuse and abuse in Kellerberrin.

  In regards to addressing social issues, CAN WA staff have come to be identified as people supporting Indigenous people in Kellerberrin and are called on to assist in tackling issues such as unemployment and financial hardship.

Working together: Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships

This final theme was concerned with the tensions and challenges that arose in the context of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnership in Kellerberrin. The notion of the contact zone was used to identify the challenges and possibilities that arise in intercultural work. Contact zones refer to places where different groups cross borders and different identities come into interaction, requiring the negotiation of identities and practices.

- Discomfort and learning in the contact zone
  Work in the contact zone is difficult and emotional and can leave people feeling vulnerable and at risk. CAN WA staff described the anxiety and disappointment they felt when borders were crossed and they came into different zones of contact. However, staff also talked about the complex and situated understanding that developed as they learnt about different lived realities and challenged their own understandings, motivations, and institutional requirements.

- Dealing with expectations
  Being responsive to different cultures and community conditions often overburdens staff involved in community development projects and can leave them with a sense of disempowerment or disappointment. Overcoming this requires the negotiation of different routines and expectations of the community and the external agency. In organising different activities and events, CAN WA staff constantly renegotiated expectations in the collaborative space while managing external constraints such as limited funding.

- The friendship in the contact zone
  Different dilemmas and frustrations non-Indigenous people face when working to address issues within the Indigenous community have been discussed in the literature and were expressed in this report. In this report, we describe how the new space created through intercultural work allows one to move beyond the dichotomy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous and to consider the broader context of relations and friendships. We also highlight the need for white people to be more aware of their dominant position and understanding of the power relations which underlie their political actions. These processes are delicate, piecemeal and formative; cultural knowledge and awareness cannot be imposed or ‘injected’, they can only be developed in an open space for shared learning.
SUMMARY AND POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

CAN WA can be commended on a number of aspects in how it has worked with the Indigenous community and wider community of Kellerberrin. Drawing on different aspects of CAN WA's involvement in the Kellerberrin community identified and discussed, we raise three points for consideration in relation to the three questions presented at the beginning of the report.

Meanings and processes of community empowerment

Feelings of empowerment amongst the Indigenous community since the establishment of the KIACDU are presented throughout the report. In the discussion of empowerment, CAN WA's support for Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing was highlighted. In doing this, CAN WA has attended to the broader context in which the Indigenous community is positioned and endeavoured to open up dialogue and understanding between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups.

Role of arts and cultural practice in supporting community empowerment

The Indigenous community in Kellerberrin had a great appreciation for what CAN WA's work in arts and cultural development had done, in terms of honouring and celebrating their identities, offering resources and expertise, and providing opportunities for them to have fun and participate in the broader community. However, the community also had a desire for greater economic and employment outcomes from the workshops and events. This may require CAN WA to access funding and develop ways issues such as unemployment can be addressed through arts and cultural practice.

Supporting Indigenous empowerment

CAN WA has and continues to examine the dominance and power it may hold in comparison to the Indigenous community. We would encourage CAN WA to continue its dialogue about intercultural practice and antiracism. This would be furthered through ideological and cultural critique of how inequalities in our society are repeated in our own practices. We would also encourage the creation of opportunities and spaces within which both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members can raise issues about intercultural practice and engage critically in the processes of challenging racism and other processes of social exclusion.
BACKGROUND

WHAT’S THIS ALL ABOUT

The aim of this research was to explore the meaning of community empowerment within the context of Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnerships, particularly in relation to arts and cultural development.

The research will provide CANWA knowledge about:

a) the meanings and processes of community empowerment, particularly in relation to working with the Indigenous community;

b) the role of arts and cultural practice in supporting community empowerment; and

c) how non-Indigenous organisations can best support Indigenous community empowerment.
The Kellerberrin Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development Unit (KIACDU) has recently been established by CAN WA in partnership with the Indigenous community in and around Kellerberrin. Although CAN WA has worked with Indigenous communities, a project of this nature is the first CAN WA has undertaken. Kellerberrin and the establishment of KIACDU are the community and organisational settings for the research and a range of key stakeholders, including CAN WA staff members and Kellerberrin community members were interviewed as part of the research.

In the remainder of this first section of the report we document the history of KIACDU and provide a description of Kellerberrin. The methodology used is then detailed before we present the findings of this research. The findings are divided into three sections and address the:

- processes of community empowerment;
- community empowerment outcomes of arts and cultural practice; and the partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders in this context.

The last section of the report summarises the findings and poses some points for consideration based on the research questions listed above.

**HOW IT ALL STARTED**

CAN WA’s decision to establish KIACDU was based on previous experience CAN WA had had with Indigenous communities. Experience showed the most effective way to support Indigenous arts and cultural development would be to provide cultural development assistance and support to a particular region (Kasat, 2006). The initiative began in 2004 with CAN WA conducting desktop research to determine an appropriate region to establish KIACDU. This revealed that there was a lack of sustainable cultural services and infrastructure in the Wheatbelt region, but that the region, Kellerberrin, in particular, had a strong potential for arts and cultural development.

Since 2002 Kellerberrin has been hosting the biannual Keela Dreaming Festival which showcases art and culture from all around the region (Kasat, 2006). The festival has grown to become the third biggest Indigenous Festival in the state. Kellerberrin is also the site for the International Arts Space Kellerberrin Australia (IASKA), which has been operating since the late 1990s and attracts national and international contemporary artists who create and exhibit work based on their experience of Kellerberrin.

The desktop research was followed by a series of consultation meetings with community members and the Shire of Kellerberrin. Initially, a meeting with various stakeholders was convened on 28 September 2004 to discuss the viability of creating an Indigenous Arts and Culture position in the Shire of Kellerberrin (Kasat, 2006). The need for the position was supported and it was recommended that a meeting with the local Indigenous community should take place. This was held on 7 December 2004 and the local Indigenous community gave ‘unanimous support for the proposed position’ to further enable the development of arts and cultural activities in the area.

At the same time as this, the Shire of Kellerberrin, in partnership with International Arts Space Kellerberrin Australia (IASKA) and the Kellerberrin Aboriginal Original People’s Association (KAPA), commissioned a feasibility study into the implementation of a contemporary art and Indigenous cultural precinct in Kellerberrin—the K Place (Kasat, 2006). The aim of this was to develop:

**together the economic potential of several different activities into a vibrant and interesting whole of town development... [and] to capture the Kellerberrin Experience: a rich collage of rural life, Indigenous culture and contemporary art (Kasat, 2006, p. 7).**

This gave further support to the readiness of Kellerberrin to embrace an Indigenous position to advocate for and inform current cultural and arts strategies in Kellerberrin (Kasat, 2006). CAN WA felt that an Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development Officer could complement the K-Place enterprise by mobilising community resources and enhancing community-building activities. The officer would be involved in providing information and technical assistance to the Indigenous community; conducting workshops or training sessions; and brokering contact with funding bodies and resources in the Kellerberrin area.

The KIACDU was launched on 6 October 2006 and is funded by the state government through Australia Council, Arts WA (Department of Culture and the Arts), Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts (DoCITA) and the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) (Kasat, 2006).

The aim of the KIACDU is to:

**To assist Indigenous self determined cultural and arts development in the Kellerberrin area by:**

- raising the profile, awareness and understanding of community cultural development with local government, artists, non-government organisations and the community;
- developing opportunities, in partnership with other stakeholders in Kellerberrin and the broader communities, for sustainable arts and cultural Indigenous driven projects in the region that will impact positively on community wellbeing;
- enabling the strengthening of Noongar networks in order to identify self directed and sustainable cultural tourism opportunities;
- strengthening the position of local Noongar people in relation to community cultural projects and activities;
- ensuring the value and integrity of community cultural development is integral to the region’s future planning;
- increasing the amount of Indigenous arts and cultural development related funding that comes into the Kellerberrin area;
- identifying community cultural development skill shortages and identify training needs in the region for CAN WA to address; and
- maintaining regular contact with CAN WA for continued mentoring and training relevant to the position.
BACKGROUND

MORE ABOUT KELLERBERRIN

Kellerberrin is 204 kilometres east of Perth in the central east or Wheatbelt region of Western Australia (http://www.kellerberrin.wa.gov.au). In the early 1860s, a number of grazing leases were taken up in the area and the local economy is still based on the wheat and sheep industry, albeit now facing incredible struggles.

Kellerberrin got its name from the Aboriginal ‘Keela’ which means large ant colony, which are found around the granite outcrop the town is built around.

According to the 2006 Census, the population of Kellerberrin is 1180, which includes people living in the town and in the greater shire (ABS, 2007). Of this, 118 people (about 10% percent) of the population are Indigenous. This compares with an average Indigenous population of about three percent in Western Australia. The Indigenous population has also increased from 75 in 1996 and 98 in 2001.

Conversely, the non-Indigenous population of 1000 in 2006 has dropped from 1110 in 1996 and from 1043 in 2001. As well as an increasing Indigenous population, the Indigenous population is also much younger with a median age of 29 years compared to the median age of 44 for non-Indigenous people.

However, the social and economic inequities in Kellerberrin between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are quite significant. Indigenous people’s income is lower at $221 per week compared with $349 per week for non-Indigenous people (ABS, 2007). As well as this, 77% of Indigenous families rent, the majority renting Homestay houses, compared to 26% of non-Indigenous households who rent. There were also no Indigenous people over the age of 15 attending an educational institution and of the 80 Indigenous people over the age of 15, only nine have completed schooling above year 10.

In addition to these statistics, some people talked about the sense that nothing much happening in Kellerberrin, prior to CAN WA establishing the KIACDU. These perceptions are conveyed in the quotations below from CAN WA staff members that are or have been local residents of Kellerberrin.

SANDY: It was just difficult because I know from when I used to live here before there was just nothing happening. I mean people would get together with their own family but now more families are joining in and it’s like they all have a purpose now and to me it’s like they’re wanting to learn more and lift the standard and be active, not be dormant.

SANDY: I always say dormant for some reason because before everything was dormant and now everything is really busy and it’s like a volcano waiting to erupt, all these good things … When we had the first art workshop through CAN WA down at CDEP [Community Development and Education Program] centre you could just feel this energy and buzz that people were like ‘Oh, I could do that’ or ‘I could do more’. It was just a really good feeling. It was like everyone was on drugs or something but it was just a natural high and they were all buzzing about …

THERESA: There’s not really been anything that was relevant for the Noongar community that was of interest for them … and my sense of that is that there haven’t been occasions to go to that are fun, things to be involved with that are fun and a bit more reason to be optimistic I think.

KEITH: It’s been terrific [having CAN WA in Kellerberrin]. It’s been important, the reason being because Aboriginal people in those areas have never had a service delivered to their communities; a service strictly for Noongar people. It hasn’t come from any other agencies. It hasn’t come from state government. It hasn’t come from the federal government even, so they’re also a community out in that region that’s been totally blocked out so to speak in terms of access to good proper service delivery to those communities. In terms of funding, there has been a lack of funds turned into those communities across all levels of the social infrastructure that the community should be acquiring.

There is also a sense that the relationships between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have been tense in Kellerberrin.

KEITH: I think it’s just a lack of understanding and ignorance from the Wadjela [non-Indigenous] community towards Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people are visual people. They like to be seen out in the streets. In terms of their drinking, there’s a core group of people who drink a lot in Kellerberrin that may represent maybe 5, maybe 10% of people. That’s their choice. What it comes down to is choice, but don’t put all Aboriginal people in the same basket. Don’t paint us with the same brush because we’re all different; but that’s been the perception of the Wadjela community. Also that comes back to historical factors, historical things that have happened in the region. There’s been a lot of racial tension

1 However, this may also be due to the increasing effectiveness of the ABS to enumerate Indigenous people.
DEIDRE: KAPA has been around since 1975. My father was with KAPA as well and was one of the committee members and there have been a lot of people who have passed on now and my ambition was to … to hold this up because of the struggle they had … They did it in the hard times and we’ve got it easy now, us young ones, we just need to be confident enough to stand up. I know a lot of people wanted us to fall, the mainstream people pick at everything that you do wrong and we wanted to show the people of Kellerberrin that the Aboriginal community is alive and well and we do have something to give to our community because for us this is our home, the land is ours.

WENDY: When we first started out Yok Yoruk, which means women’s meeting place, that’s in Noongar language, we were sitting down grieving, there were a couple of ladies grieving because their son passed away. We met at a house, we had a cup of tea and sat down, then we said ‘Oh, we’ll move to another house, different one, different house … ’ and then we come we came up with a centre, so we had this whole house as a centre … everybody used it. I then went away and it just fell through then, but hopefully now we’re starting again.

Another symbol of the community’s strength is the bi-annual Keela Dreaming festival, also described here by Deidre.

It’s the same with our Keela Dreaming. We’ve been going now for the last 11 years when it first was approached by the Shire to do a cultural festival. I mean, starting from scratch, not having anything to build on so it’s just built up now to probably the third best cultural festival … in WA. It’s a lot of hard work. The community knows that they have to get up and do a lot of the stuff themselves and coming together and I think the highlight and the achievement is that they really appreciate that they’ve done something and [that] they did it.

The way in which CAN WA has worked with these strengths is described in the findings. However, before this the research framework and process is briefly described.

of course and with the previous government legislations and the Stolen Generation in the mission days for example. You know the power of men and particularly white men in communities quite often on councils, you’ll see a whole heap of white men in their 40s, 50s and 60s who sit on the council and these people are firmly entrenched with their views about Aboriginal people and Aboriginal issues.

Despite these social statistics and experiences within the community, the Indigenous community have considerable pride in their language and culture. For example, a quotation from Wendy,

We have been living in Kellerberrin just about all our lives and I’m 62 and I’ve had my childhood around here and we did struggle, very, very hard, we suffered. Our people, we always stayed by ourselves on a mission until we come into town … Our own language and our culture whatever we want to do, through culture we do it. We still go back to our mission and sit down and look around. To be this far it’s a really lovely feeling. We’ve got a very very strong feeling about this now.

Many of the Indigenous people regularly visit the reserve (situated a few kilometres from the centre of Kellerberrin), where they or their ancestors were born, married, lived and died. Here and at other significant sites stories are shared, particularly by the older people in the community. In addition to this, twelve people in Kellerberrin are also recorded as speaking an Indigenous language well or very well (ABS, 2007). The continuation of two key Indigenous organisations in Kellerberrin also signals the strength within the Indigenous community. Since 1975, KAPA has existed in the community despite facing challenges and recently the women’s group, Yok Yoruk, re-established itself. Histories of both organisations are described below.
In community arts practice the focus is typically on promoting participation and not the aesthetic or the end arts product (Goldbard & Adams, 2000).
The work can be broadly conceived of as espousing an emancipatory agenda (Boal, 1998; Freire, 1972). In fact, in community cultural development and community arts practice, participation is seen as a key mechanism for empowerment because of its focus on citizen engagement and democratic decision making processes (Adams & Goldbard, 2001; Flowers & McEwen, 2004; Matarasso, 1997; Sonn et al., 2002, The Globalism Institute, 2002, 2004; Williams, 1995). Initially we set out to explore perceptions of community change using the arts. However, as is often the case with collaborative research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005), the way in which the research and arts practices were combined evolved and changed. This process is discussed below. Before we commenced one of the researchers, Meredith Green, talked to the community and KIACDU officers about the project thereby raising the community’s awareness of it. Throughout the project they were asked about how they wanted it to be carried out (i.e., timelines, methods of observation and discussion) what type of art workshops they would be interested in, and how they would like to benefit from the research. Any changes that needed to be made to ensure the research is carried out in a respectful and appropriate manner were incorporated into the project plan.

THE WORKSHOPS

Three workshops were held with the community, an outline of each is given below. Initially we proposed that we would ask people to represent changes in communities (community feeling, mood, sentiments) through their artwork and then discuss how these changes were empowering or not. Unfortunately, at the time the research began, the KIACDU had already been established for about six months and workshops and events had already been held. Therefore, we did not have the opportunity for people to represent their perceptions of Kellerberrin before and after the establishment of the KIACDU. The researcher and artist involved in conducting the workshops discussed ways of representing change retrospectively, however, this proved to be too difficult using visual mediums.

As a consequence, we changed the project so that workshops focused on what Kellerberrin meant to the community. Art or stories produced within these workshops were then used to ask the questions described below in individual interviews. The researchers also observed the workshops, and other events, such as the Badjaling Cultural Festival, the NAIDOC ball and KIACDU launch.

Artwork produced at the first and second workshops were displayed at the Badjaling Cultural Festival held in May 2008, as is shown in the photographs above.
The final set of questions asked about suggested changes to KIACDU and the future of Kellerberrin:

• Would you like KIACDU to do anything else or change the way it does things?
• What do you want for the future of Kellerberrin?

A different suite of questions were asked of CAN WA staff.

A first set of questions asked about their history and role in CAN WA:

• How long have you worked for CAN WA?
• What is your role at CAN WA?
• How have you been involved with KIACDU?
• What do you like/don’t like about living here?

The second set of questions asked CAN WA staff about their experience of working in Kellerberrin and with the Indigenous community in Kellerberrin:

• What has been your experience working in Kellerberrin?
• What has been your experience working with Indigenous people in Kellerberrin?
•Were there any difficulties working in Kellerberrin? With KIACDU? With the Indigenous community? How were these difficulties overcome?
• What did you enjoy about working with KIACDU?

In most cases the interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour and were semi-structured around the questions listed above.

WORKSHOP 1: Photography with Natalija Brunovs (and Meredith Green)

A number of young women in Kellerberrin had recently completed a Liveworx course carried out by staff at CAN WA and had become interested in photography and in gaining additional photographic skills. So the first workshop we held was a two-day photography workshop. A number of women came in and out throughout the day and four women came consistently over the two days. They learnt about light, colour and patterns in photography and were encouraged to take photos of what Kellerberrin meant to them.

WORKSHOP 2: Silk screening with Natalija Brunovs (and Meredith Green)

The older women in the community who are closely associated with Yök Yoruk were interested in doing a silk screening workshop. They do a lot of sewing and were interested in making and printing their own designs for the garments, bags and tablecloths they make. Six women completed the two day workshop. Once again a number of others joined us throughout the two days. The women were asked to design something that they felt represented Kellerberrin.

WORKSHOP 3: Out bush with Keith Walsh (and Chris Sonn)

This workshop was conducted in response to what the men in the community needed. Unfortunately an art workshop did not eventuate. Instead local Indigenous men took Chris Sonn to visit sites of importance to them and discussed their hopes for Kellerberrin and their community.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews were not only conducted with people who participated in the workshops, but also with key stakeholders in Kellerberrin, identified by CAN WA and CAN WA staff. Questions for key stakeholders and workshop participants followed the schedule below.

A first set of questions asked about their history and connection to Kellerberrin:

• How long have you lived in Kellerberrin for?
• Why do you live here?
• How do you feel about living here?
• What does Kellerberrin mean to you?
• What do you like/don’t like about living here?

The second set of questions asked about the establishment of KIACDU:

• What was Kellerberrin like before KIACDU was set up?
• What has it been like having KIACDU?
• What has changed in Kellerberrin since it was set up?
• Were there any difficulties? How were these difficulties overcome?
• Have you been involved in the workshops/events in Kellerberrin? How have you found them?
• How do the Indigenous and non-Indigenous get along in Kellerberrin? Has this changed since KIACDU was set up?

The aim of the analysis was to clarify perceptions of KIACDU’s role in community empowerment and describe people’s lived experiences and perceptions of the process of empowerment through art and cultural practice. By doing this we sought to gain a sense of the perceived effect CAN WA has had on the Kellerberrin community.

In order to do the analysis, we adopted an approach that allowed us to describe particular events and people’s experiences and evaluations of those events in the broader community. Instead of separating our review of literature from our interpretation and analysis, we decided on an iterative approach that brings together academic literature and interview data to offer an interpretive reading of the information we gathered. NVIVO was used as the data management system. We had broadly defined research questions which provided an initial focus for the data analysis. Guided by these questions, data was analysed, using NVIVO tools, for recurring and unique themes pertaining to people’s experiences and perceptions of CAN WAs involvement in Kellerberrin. These questions and the themes that were generated provided parameters for and guided the search for literature. In this sense the analyses and resulting interpretation followed a substantive theorising approach (Wicker, 1989).
As discussed earlier, three broad thematic areas emerged from the data analysis and interpretation. These include:

1. Processes of community empowerment;
2. Community empowerment outcomes of arts and cultural practice; and
3. Partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders in this context.

We describe and interpret these different themes, which includes definitions drawn from the literature, which are, in turn, connected with observations and interview data. Quotations from the interviewees and notes from the researchers are used to illustrate the different thematic areas we identified.
Based on this, it is evident that community empowerment is processual and reflects different levels of analysis, including individual, interactional and organisational components.

CAN WA has an expressed commitment to community empowerment. The interview data suggests specific activities supported by CAN WA resulted in feelings of empowerment for some. The quotes below describe feelings of empowerment that emerged through CAN WA's support for the community and arts and cultural development.

**KEITH:** I think giving people a sense that someone’s there to support them, no matter where you are in the country [Indigenous] people are feeling inadequate. ... that can only benefit and build all that self-esteem stuff and create a sense of respect and wellbeing in communities.

Importantly, Cornish (2006) added that when working in community projects it is important to clarify domains of participation and action in empowerment research, because different domains of action and participation require different types of power to act. Community empowerment is dynamic and can be broken down into operational domains or processes of empowerment. Six of these:

- gaining trust;
- being responsive;
- providing resources and expertise;
- letting go;
- making connections; and
- collaboration with other agencies

are described below. The focus is on how describing CAN WA's role in each of these domains or processes of empowerment.

### PROCESSES OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Community art and cultural practice are seen as key to promoting community participation and community empowerment (Flowers & McEwen, 2004; Hawkins, 1993; Mills & Brown, 2004; Ruane, 2007; Sonn et al., 2002). Although, there is an overlap between community participation and community empowerment, community empowerment is explicitly aimed at social and political changes through people’s participation, not simply program participation (Laverack, 2001; Laverack & Labonte, 2000). It is about people's ability to critically assess the social, political, economic and other contextual causes of disempowerment and gain more control over the decisions they make about their lived realities (Cornish, 2006; Fawcett et al., 1995; Laverack & Labonte, 2000; Rappaport, 1995). One of the ways this occurs through people participating democratically in projects of collective interest (Lekoko & van der Merwe, 2006).

The broad goals of community empowerment are about social and institutional change in a community, which improves the quality of life for communities and reduces inequalities of power and poverty (Laverack & Labonte, 2000; Lekoko & van der Merwe, 2006). However, community empowerment is also subjective and constructed through individual and collective local beliefs and ‘truths’ (Laverack & Labonte, 2000). Along similar lines, Rappaport (1995) suggested that ‘empowerment goals are enhanced when people discover, or create and give voice to, a collective narrative that sustains their personal life story in positive ways.’ (p. 796).
Everett et al. (2007) found that what often attracted people to the resource centres was family and friends already attending. After a while a core group formed and other members in the community became involved in the centre. As people became involved, the role for community staff was to provide opportunities, direction and suggestions for clients. This process has also started to happen with the Yok Yoruk group.

CATHY: I’d like it to grow a bit more you know. I’d like to see more people involved, more of our families, towns involved.

INTERVIEWER: So what’s keeping other family members away?

CATHY: I don’t know, they probably just need that bit of a lead on. We've got one woman joining us this afternoon. She came here once and she went 'I didn’t know this was here' say well you know, we need some more to come along and sit down with us.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think younger people are going to come and do things?

WENDY: They probably would. I reckon with a little bit more encouragement they probably would. We got t-shirts and all they’ve got to do is sew them up the sides, for their own kids, not for our kids but for their kids. They can put pictures or whatever they want on them. We try to leave it open as much as we can for them to come along. We don’t want to push them or anything like that. I mean they can just come in and do things but we don’t want drunken people coming in.

Gaining trust

Lewis and Weigert (1985) argue that trust is multifaceted including behavioural, cognitive, and emotional aspects that ‘are merged into unitary social experience’ (p. 969). In their view:

…the primary function of trust is sociological rather than psychological, since individuals would have no occasion or need to trust apart from social relationships. In addition we would like to argue that, like its function, the bases on which trust rests are primarily social as well. This raises the question of how trust in other persons and institutions is established, maintained, and when necessary, restored (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p.969).

Building trust is a key to promoting community participation, as reflected in the notion of social capital (e.g. Baum, 1999a) and has been identified as a foundation for collaborative relationships (Trickett & Espino, 2004). In discussing the establishment of family resource centres, Everett, Hornstead and Drisko (2007) identified that getting people involved meant addressing the mistrust of some families towards support services—that is restoring trust in institutions. This has also been the case in Kellerberrin as Cathy and Wendy discuss below.

CATHY: I think they do a lot of good things. It’s just that, you know what it is, is people [some members of the Indigenous community] don’t take them [CAN WA] up on it. They [some members of the Indigenous community] don’t go and sit down with them [CAN WA]. I think that might bring a bit of frustration towards them [CAN WA] sometimes, when they [some members of the Indigenous community] don’t use them [CAN WA].

WENDY: They [CAN WA] think that they’re not wanted.

CATHY: There are some people in the town who don’t really go and use the place.

INTERVIEWER: How come?

CATHY: Well that’s what we’d like to know.

WENDY: They [some members of the Indigenous community] just want to be by themselves … don’t want too much to do with anything and you get some that will come right out.

CATHY: I don’t know, but after a while they might realise and come in to join. They must see what we’re doing eh. Because I feel we’re … at one stage there, I thought well nobody wants to use, like come to us and use the place, well we’re not taking over from anyone, we’re just here and whoever who wants to use it just come and join in.

INTERVIEWER: So what’s keeping other family members away?

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Another aspect of developing trust discussed by Everett et al. (2007) was employing people from the community. Staff at the Kellerberrin office as well as one staff member in the Perth office has strong links with the local community. These existing connections were important for entering and building relationships in the community. Importantly, these connections were not only professional, but they were also personal. Keith speaks about the nature of the relationships between community members and agency staff. He emphasises the importance of building social relationships with people and knowing the histories.

It’s about building that trust and of course all that has come about because of us being Aboriginal people on the ground in the Indigenous community. I think it would have been a different story if we’d had non-Aboriginal people working in the Unit. It’s about our relationships socially outside of what we do on the ground here. It’s about our relationships socially… I live in another town, yet there are social links between the families and also family links, historical links as well between those communities in the region and just knowing people before the Unit was created. I think that gave us a sense of belonging to that community. We can go to any house in Kellerberrin and knock on their door and have a cup of tea and sit down. We’ve been doing that, talking to all the different families, just going around, sitting around for a yarn. It’s made our job a lot easier.

The importance of having connections with staff in establishing trust is reflected in the responses from the community.

DEIDRE: Good, well I went to school with Theresa so I have a good connection with Theresa. Having her there too, having that backgrounding with us as well so she knows everyone here and everybody knows her. It’s always a good thing because sometimes it can take longer to develop if you have a stranger, but building up trust with Aboriginal communities it takes a lot because of past things and CAN WA has that.

The transfer of trust from a staff member employed from the community to one of the non-Indigenous Perth-based staff members, Rachel, mentioned in the quotation below, is similar to the notion of vouching, a process through which members of a community can convey positive or negative information about someone, as described by Westerman (2004) in her work alongside Indigenous people.

INTERVIEWER: With working with Sandy, you talked about her doing a lot of the liaising and getting the girls together, so how else did that relationship benefit you when you were going into this?

RACHEL: I suppose it’s that trust transfer I suppose. If you’ve got somebody that’s already got a relationship with the young people and they already trust her and then there’s strangers that are coming in, but if they know that we’re somehow through her and connected to her and she trusts us, there’s a bit of transfer of the trust I think and her being able to say ‘Yeah, come on this is a really good opportunity and will give you something to do, and learn new skills’. In terms of advocacy, I think she played a really big role in that.

The importance of the ongoing commitment from CAN WA in developing trust in the community was also discussed by community member (Deidre) and CAN WA staff member (Rachael). This is particularly important given the sporadic and short term nature of many community building initiatives, which can be a major threat to community building initiatives in CAN WA projects (Sonn et al., 2002) as well as other initiatives (see Trickett & Espino, 2004).

DEIDRE: I think the community likes the ongoing commitments. They don’t like things like ‘We’re only going to have this one-off thing’. We want ongoing things. We see a lot of Keith and Sandy (CAN WA staff based in Kellerberrin). They come down to our meetings, they mix in—they just know what it’s about.

RACHEL: I definitely hope that there can be some sort of longer term stuff that we can get involved with. Obviously there’s all sorts of stuff that’s going out there that we all get drawn into and we catch up with them as well, so I think that’s really important as well. Originally we had the money and we were just going to go to Merredin and all of these places and just deliver it and then leave and then you wouldn’t have had that long term, but at least now we do have that contact where we see them at different events that are going on and I think there’s value just in that, that ‘remember when’ type experience.

Being responsive

Empowerment and empowering practices and processes are negotiated within specific institutional, cultural, and socio-historical contexts. Empowerment relies on the community development workers to be able to identify needs, define problems, share experiences and knowledge, and plan, execute and evaluate actions (Lekoko & van der Merwe, 2006). Central to this is the need for responsiveness and cultural sensitivity, which requires a familiarity with local community rhythms (Harrell & Bond, 2006) and respect for local cultural protocols and practices, and individual and community capacities. Keith and Sandy, who are both CAN WA staff members from within the community, raise different issues within Kellerberrin that require this responsiveness and sensitivity.

KEITH: Yeah, one of the other things which I didn’t bring in our initial talk was the impact of a death in communities. We’ve had a few deaths in our community since about July and … we actually had workshops scheduled during those periods and that really impacted on us as CAN WA and our ability to deliver a service. The communities actually shut right down every time there’s a death in the communities and that really impacts on what we’re doing because quite often it takes up to two or three weeks before you start getting back on track and this year in particular, both in July and August, we had two deaths of family members in Kellerberrin. That really impacted on us for those two months. It was really difficult to engage the community because they were in mourning … I think we need to talk about that because for other agencies around,
RACHEL: Well, we talked to the young girls about it [non-attendance at workshops] and it was pretty much like ‘Nah nah, it’s not that we don’t want to go, it’s just that it’s pay day’. So, that was pretty much it, it was like okay, well then we need to change the days then.

INTERVIEWER: How did that affect you having to change the days?

RACHEL: That was fine. I mean I suppose the way that we are trying to work is you know to be flexible and to meet the needs of what is within reason, of what you can do.

THERESA: It felt challenging this last winter when there were three significant deaths … and that was quite a learning period for us because it was hard to figure out what would be okay to actually hold a workshop again, when the community would be ready to come to a workshop again. It was hard for him [Keith] to figure out what was happening then and it was winter-time and it was too cold and the KAPA building was flooded but when you’re in the middle of it it’s hard to figure out whether the community just isn’t interested, but I suppose in hindsight it makes sense. So there are those puzzles and even with Keith and Sandy on the ground it can be hard for them to know sometimes …

Providing resources and expertise

Providing resources and expertise is a more easily defined and tangible aspect of the community empowerment process. The different resources that external agencies can provide as part of the capacity building processes are diverse and can include basic forms of social support, information and skills (Laverack, 2001; Laverack & Labonte, 2000). Matarasso (2007) found that successful community projects are those which receive substantial formal (training) and informal (site visits, specialist training through local experts, support with negotiating with public bodies, receiving crisis calls) support. Flowers and McEwen (2004) also wrote that reigniting community initiatives of the Torch project were based upon community building processes that require sharing of basic skills and resources as part of the broader change initiatives. In a similar way, CAN WA as an external agency provided resources and skills central to the empowerment processes. This is illustrated in the quotes below.

WENDY: You don’t see the DCD; you don’t see them until you want to see them, until you ring them. They had an office here but they closed that off. They work through Merredin and they have a woman there, a black woman, that works with them and they come and say ‘Oh yeah you want this and this’, but where are they, they’re not there? And then you get, see like Keith and them you can walk in there, you can sit down and you feel the difference in your heart, ‘Oh this is someone who cares’.

CATHY: See even if we go to Keith’s office, we just go there just for a yarn and a laugh. I am very thankful for CAN WA because they have been with us all the way helping us through everything here.

As indicated in the quotes above, for the Indigenous community the CAN WA office symbolised a place where they could feel they belonged and could have their needs met. This interaction illustrates the dynamics of community empowerment between the organisational dimensions (e.g. having the infrastructure) and the social dimensions (e.g. sense of belonging, connectedness etc.) and how it leads to people coming together to address their concerns (2001; Laverack & Labonte, 2000).

Keith and Sandy also highlighted the respect Perth-based CAN WA staff gave to the issues described above and their willingness and openness to understand these issues.

INTERVIEWER: And have you found the understanding here [Perth CAN WA office] okay … ?

KEITH: Very much so. I think the Perth people are reliant on our advice, what we give and our decisions that we make and that’s been important to our work.

SANDY: Well, I’ll explain to Theresa and that, because we’ve had a few problems like the people won’t turn up on pay days and stuff like that or the shame and once I explain these things to Theresa and we become more aware of them ourselves, we work around those problems and we work it out and it works.

However, for CAN WA staff being responsive was challenging at times and required flexibility, patience and persistence with the dynamics and history of powerlessness. These are particularly unique qualities for an organisation also dealing with the timelines and demands of funding bodies.
The ability for CAN WA to allow communities to take their own direction and be the experts in their own communities is reflected in the quotations below from Cathy. The first two quotations describe how CAN WA assisted with re-establishing Yok Yoruk.

**INTERVIEWER:** And so you were saying before that the other people in Quairading or Cunderdin didn’t have these sorts of things [Yok Yoruk]?

**CATHY:** A lot of places say to us, right down to Pingelly, right down the south-west way talk about Kellerberrin.

**INTERVIEWER:** So why do you think you guys have got it together?

**CATHY:** Well I think because we had CAN WA’s help in the beginning. We would probably be still struggling along. I think it’s been important and we’ll still continue to do that as well and about to guide people and offer whatever support we can as CAN WA, again for those community groups.

According to Matarasso (2007), successful projects were also those that emerged from discussions with the community about their local needs and ideas. This gives people who have had no experience in project development and whose ideas were perhaps of little interest to outsiders to have their ideas supported and in some cases, funded. Establishing projects on people’s interests also means expertise exists in the community and external advisors are not depended on. This is clearly demonstrated in Kellerberrin with the support given to Yok Yoruk and KAPA by CAN WA.

Authors (e.g., Lekeko & Van der Merwe, 2006) have indicated that there are risks if an expert-led model of the support is adopted. Lekeko and van der Merwe (2006) describe some of the risks based on their research in Botswana. In particular they discuss interventions referred to as ‘athama-o-je’, meaning open your mouth and eat, in which communities are simply given free resources as a form of empowerment. These practices contribute to the dependency, passivity and inactivity of the poor because they become the dependent receivers of interventions rather than being part of the development process. It is argued that while these approaches may be useful one-off responses to a specific and dire need, as empowerment interventions they limit the agency and abilities of people in the community and are often resisted by the community as it appears community development workers look down on the community.

The other challenge for us now and the ongoing challenge is to help build more capacity of the two organisations … Yok Yoruk and KAPA in terms of good corporate governance of an organisation, having regular meetings, having financial statements being done up on a regular basis and being presented to meetings.

**BILL:** CAN WA is providing expertise to help them to produce those goods, market and sell and put those resources back into where they are needed or as they are identified by working with that group or that section of the community they can identify.

**WENDY:** I would love to see our centres grow. Everybody doing … there’s plenty to do. Cathy said to the girls on the street that there’s plenty to do over there, there’s plenty of material, the sewing machines [partly funded by CAN WA] are sitting there and get over and do it and while we’ve got that screen painting [workshop held by CAN WA] there now, you can learn to do that …

Having the whole proper process of meetings happening, you know the duties of council, of board reps, you know, the secretary’s role, the treasurer’s role, the chairperson’s role. These are issues that need to be reinforced into those committee members and have that ongoing process being done to the organisations, building capacity of those organisations so they can be strong organisations in the near future for their groups. So we’re still doing that mentoring work that we’ve been doing. I think it’s been important and we’ll still continue to do that as well and about to guide people and offer whatever support we can as CAN WA, again for those community groups.

This relationship was not about dependency, passivity and inactivity, rather it has been an enabling and encouraging one that has led people to start planning and implementing changes for their community’s future.

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While there are examples of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community coming together, it is often around seasonal activities such as football, as described below, again by Keith.

Quite often with regional towns, Aboriginal boys, they play football, come footy pre season, these Wadjela people and farmers and whoever else, go looking for the Noongar boys to come along to footy training … That happens every January, February and March. Boys are back talking with the farmers and the people in town and the Noongar boys think it’s wonderful … come the end of the footy season, that’s the last point of contact. The last final that the people have or the last home match if they don’t get into the finals, that’s the last point of contact. You go along and attend their wind-up do at the footy club or the pub and that’s the end of that. Normally from September/October, right through to January and February, there’s no real point of contact between the Aboriginal communities, the Aboriginal boys who play football and the Wadjela community.

Sandy and Theresa highlight the depth of some of these divisions between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Kellerberrin.

RACHEL: Well that was in terms of just being able to get artists out there, and be able to I suppose pay, because I didn’t know how much money I had to work with, and because we didn’t know how many participants, but this is a challenge for all of my programs, not just for this one. But in particular, it’s harder because you’re investing a lot more in an artist going out to a regional area to turn up for no people to be there, than you are in a metro setting.

Making connections in the community

The next two community empowerment processes discussed are about making connections, firstly between community members and secondly between organisations. As discussed earlier in the introduction, there have been some tensions between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities of Kellerberrin. These are suggested as Keith, the Indigenous local CAN WA staff member, describes the difficulty in attracting non-Indigenous people to CAN WA or Indigenous-led events in the community.

…the Solomon people came along and did the workshop in the school; that was all good. At the end of that performance at the school we said ‘Right, you people are invited and are quite welcome to come up to the Prev. Invite your parents; tell your parents to come along and we’re all going to have a great time’. About five or six Wadjelas came along to that function out of about 100 people who came along to the Solomon Islander cultural exchange. The Keela Dreaming for example was a classic case of division. Out of 2000 people, there was something like 30 Wadjelas who came along … When it came to the Keela Dreaming, the culmination of the Extravaganza and the big performance there, a lot of the Wadjela families, I think up to 20 families actually withdrew their children from the performance.

That’s right and of course Aboriginal people are scared of going to the Wadjela functions so it’s a two-way thing. Fred [Shire employee] actually identified that as well, in a couple of meetings. He said ‘Right, you Noongars, if you want the white person to come along maybe you should think about wanting to go along to their dos and functions’ which is a fair call but who’s going to take the first step?

Note from the researchers:
CAN WAs efforts were also observed at a recent community event held in Badjaling, a small Indigenous community about two and half hours away from Perth. The event, expected to host 1000 people, was made more difficult by a broken generator, no gas for the BBQ and a limited amount of music equipment. However, these challenges were overcome by CAN WA staff responding to the problems that emerged on the day.

THERESA: … people like Peter [Indigenous community member] have said to me that it’s been really harmonious in town lately and I don’t think he was just telling me that for the sake of telling me, I think that the energy in town is shifting but it will take the white people a really long time to notice. In the past there has been a bit of feuding and fighting between some of the groups but that isn’t happening now and Peter said to me probably about three months ago that he spoke to a woman in another family group for the first time in a lot of years and he spoke to her at a CAN WA thing … he was proud that he’d spoken to her so there’s healing happening within the community and there’s a lot of good stuff going on but the white community seem to be quite oblivious to it and there’s only a handful of people that seem to be interested.

Woolcock (1998) detailed how culture, power and rationality influence developmental outcomes through various types of social relations. For optimal developmental outcomes, nurturing social relations must exist within local communities; between local communities and external social networks in civil society; between civil society and macro-level institutions; and within corporate sector institutions. Strategic approaches are needed to strengthen community empowerment as it moves from the development or strengthening of small mutual groups, to community organisations, to inter-organisational networks and finally political action (Laverack & Labonte, 2000).
Collaboration: Connecting agencies

The second form of connections required for the development of community empowerment is between different community organisations. Everett, et al. (2007) found that collaborating with other agencies in the community was central to developing activities and services that the community wanted and needed as well as maintaining participation. According to Trickett and Espino (2004), local collaborations are particularly important where much of the impetus of the development has come from outside the community. This typically means that the local community and those who control funding resources are brought together. Although in this case CAN WA was not necessarily the key funding body, but provided a means to funding and other resources.

Two positive collaborations in Kellerberrin exist between CAN WA and KAPA and Yok Yoruk. In the quotes below Deidre and Sandy talk about how together the two organisations are better able to meet the needs of the community.

INTERVIEWER: What effects do you think having CAN WA has had?

DEIDRE: It’s that connection to the mainstream which is really, really important because it’s like eyes and ears there for us and having that person to help us grow stronger.

DEIDRE: … trying to get something done in the mainstream has always been hard for Aboriginal people and they always need somebody stronger to be there and I think with Keith over there who has a lot of experience as being in the mainstream area can be that person that can lead a lot of the people that need that encouragement.

KEITH: I’ve always maintained that we should have an open door policy for our community members and that’s right across the board and that has been the case. We’ve got an open door policy and will continue to have an open door policy. Anyone in the community can come to the Community Arts Network, whether you’re black, white or whatever and be able to come in for a yarn and some advice and if we’re able to assist, then we’re quite happy to do that.

SANDY: CAN WA have been at the forefront in helping these organisations get up and running and building them and making them stronger. Yes, they have been fantastic in that degree and probably Keith, who has certainly assisted with Yok Yoruk and KAPA greatly … and now they have that trust with him so if they need any assistance with anything they’ve got that trust and respect for Keith that they’ll come and ask. If they’re not too sure about stuff they’ll ask Keith and if Keith doesn’t know the answer he’ll find the answer for them. So yes, a very good partnership there and very strong with the three organisations I think.

Dhesi (2000) discussed how it is crucial for formal institutions to support the informal institutions in a community towards collective action and not diminish trust. If the formal and informal institutions are in conflict, community action becomes difficult. As can be seen in the quote below, CAN WA recognised this and endeavours to support and enhance the existing strengths in the community, such as the Keela Dreaming festival.

PHILLIPA: … there was something that we could support and help to build, that we wouldn’t be coming to stir the pot so to speak, we wouldn’t be coming with our own agenda, we were there with something to say, look you’ve already got this amazing thing, maybe we can work together to develop it.
Letting go

As has been described earlier, CAN WA’s Perth office began as the outside agents for the KIACDU in Kellerberrin and provided the infrastructure, skills development, technical expertise, leadership and financial support (Laverack, 2001; Laverack & Labonte, 2000). However, this role for community development organisations changes as people’s capacities and power increases over time (Laverack & Labonte, 2000). The community needs to be free to identify its own issues and decide how it wants to move forward and outside agents must increasingly share their control over decisions and access to the resources. Everett et al. (2007) reported that in the family resource centres, formal organisational structures, such as advisory councils, began to form as the community began to recognise its emerging power. The relationship between the community and staff shifted towards a partnership, which required staff to negotiate a shift in control and authority. Staff roles became more consultative and they were delegated tasks and responsibilities by the community, which meant staff had to relinquish some of their tasks and responsibilities and pass them on to the community as they took leadership roles within the centres.

As leadership roles are taken on, the community takes ownership of the process (Everett et al., 2007). Laverack and colleagues also discuss how control needs to be situated with the primary stakeholders to ensure there is a sense of ownership and so the program addresses their concerns (Laverack, 2001; Laverack & Labonte, 2000). Over time, control has been passed from the non-Indigenous staff in the CAN WA office in Perth to the Indigenous CAN WA staff based in Kellerberrin and the broader Indigenous community. The quotations from Theresa, who is a Perth-based CAN WA staff member, but who has had the primary role in supporting local Kellerberrin CAN WA staff members, illustrates the process of letting go and the community taking the lead.

Managing the workload, that’s been a challenge. I think that what I’m feeling now is that Keith and Sandy are taking more of the workload and that I’m not carrying as much as I was but in the initial stages I was carrying a fair bit of the load and I think that Keith ‘got’ how much load I was carrying and is carrying more now … I think he’s got more confidence in the role too … If I look back at the launch I did heaps for that launch and of course Keith was brand new then … If we did that again now, Keith would be way more switched on to getting the cups from the hall and getting this and getting that, so I think that is definitely a developmental thing. It has been my job really to help things happen and I’m really excited when I notice things that I would have had to help with before and I don’t have to do now.

Yeah, well, I absolutely don’t want to do anything to undermine anything that Keith and Sandy are doing but it is true to say that sometimes things get forgotten and things like Keith has to write something for our Bulletin magazine or something and I do say “How are you going on that?” and “Are you getting time to do that Bulletin article at all?” or “Are you completely fine with it?” because sometimes I’m wondering whether he’s struggling with it, [and whether] that might be the reason he hasn’t done it or he just hasn’t had the time to do it or it hasn’t been a priority and he is much more saying ‘No, I will completely do it on my own, that’s okay but thanks for asking’ …

My goal would be to be completely redundant and to be able to leave Keller but I think some of this stuff does require a bit more nurturing probably and I absolutely completely see Sandy and Keith before my eyes getting way stronger. Like with this PowerPoint presentation that we’re doing for Denmark, Keith’s phoning me to say ‘Look, we need to talk about this’. I’m coming on Monday, can we talk about it?” but he’s the one whom been chasing me on it and with Sandy doing the whole ball [NAIDOC ball held by KAPA] thing, I see that they are actually in leaps and bounds getting stronger and stronger and I reckon Sandy and Keith will do presentations at conferences in the future and I won’t …

The fact that KAPA is running this ball completely on their own is certainly a sign that the mentoring of governance stuff is working I think. I’m not doing anything to support the ball because I have asked Sandy if she needs support or wants support to organise anything and she’s confident and just said ‘Its okay, I’m organising the tables, I’ve done the tickets, I’m going to be really busy’. She is doing it in CAN WA time and CDEP time but it’s not draining any Perth office resources.

As well as this organic developmental change, CAN WA also had a strategic approach to letting go and shifting the power to the local CAN WA office and broader Indigenous community of Kellerberrin. After about two years of working with the Kellerberrin community, CAN WA were starting to discuss succession plans for the KIACDU, which are described by Phillipa below.

… we talked to those guys [KAPA], we talked about how can we start to really think in our transitions, how we move from this kind of model if you like, with CAN WA having an office there to a model in which the Aboriginal organisations in town are much more active and present and also are developing a profile with funding bodies.

… we [CAN WA] had a meeting in which we talked about this [decreasing CAN WA’s involvement] and [another] five years may be a good length of time. Keith, Theresa and I are going to meet with the people from DCITA [Department of Communities, Information Technology and the Arts], the ICC [Indigenous Coordination Centres] Perth … and I think I will have to flag at that meeting that this is probably the last CAN WA application in this round and [explain] we’re talking to KAPA … and that the following one, it will be a partnership … maybe apply together for funds and maybe eventually KAPA is an employer of Keith and Sandy and maybe we try to maintain, whether it’s Theresa or someone else, but someone who maintains strong communication, but we may not have people based there [Kellerberrin] anymore … but that could be I think a really good outcome and maybe we can take certain roles and maybe work in projects together or maybe we can take on some part in helping organise the Keela Dreaming. So maybe a five year outlook.
EMPOWERMENT OUTCOMES THROUGH ARTS AND CULTURE

In the following section we focus specifically on the connections between empowerment and arts and cultural development. Simply, art is a way of peoples’ concrete achievements being recognised by others (Matarasso, 2007). The link between empowerment and arts and cultural practice also exists in arguments that creativity is integral to social activism and to people reclaiming control over their lives (Clover, 2007). Art and cultural development projects can build on social capital and support the growth of informal associations to social enterprises and thereby give people the ‘power to take collective action towards shared goals’ (Matarasso, 2007, p.456).

Art and cultural practice has been used in many countries to achieve different social outcomes (Matarasso, 2007). This is despite the shift in community arts away from community development and towards individual development outcomes in the 1980s and 90s, as part of the broader political and discursive shift towards individual responsibility for change and the shift from group to individual action. Different projects reported the use of art and cultural practice to:

- strengthen community, activism and civic dialogue;
- express, represent and challenge issues that concern particular groups (e.g. racism, poverty, illness);
- resist negative mainstream discourses;
- promote learning, skill acquisition and economic independence; or
- promote a culture of safe self and communal expression (e.g. Cameron, 2007; Clover, 2007; Kaimal & Gerber, 2007; Matarasso, 2007).

The role CAN WA has had in achieving some of these social outcomes was indicated in the previous section. For example, CAN WA acting as a link between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community. However, the value of community arts and cultural practice in the context of community empowerment in Kellerberrin is detailed and illustrated in this section. The outcomes reported below include:

- acquiring new skills;
- having fun;
- healing through sharing; and
- addressing social issues.

Acquiring new skills

For community arts projects where the community is central to planning and organising the event or activity, the value extends beyond the actual event or activity. People involved in planning and organising the event can learn how to plan, organise and manage complex projects, develop contacts, deliver a wide range of activities and attract a good attendance and earn income (Bradley, Deighton, & Selby, 2004; Matarasso, 2007; Mills & Brown, 2004). These are in essence activities aimed at skills and network development that have been reported in the literature as central to the community empowerment and capacity for community change (Bradley, et al.; Fawcett, et al., 1995). Key stakeholders from the non-Indigenous community hoped that the long-term support from and the workshops conducted by CAN WA would provide the Indigenous community the opportunity for learning these skills.

BILL: In the end one would assume you’ll see people with positive attitudes, we’ll see perhaps another business created, we’ll see a marketing promotion there about that business, we’ll probably see increased tourism, we’ll see more activities related to cultural art and development ... I would assume because that’s the natural progression following the input that CAN WA are putting and the commitment they are making to our community.
Having fun

Clover (2007) talked about the importance of having hope and fun, celebrating what you achieve and imagining a different future through creating art (see also Putland, 2008). The excitement and hope materialising from activities and events supported by CANWA are described in the quotes below from Deidre and Cathy.

DEIDRE: They [the community] love the field trips, getting together and going on a bus, the excitement that it generates …

CATHY: … so that’s what we’d like to do, some clothes and try to do some more gowns, maybe have some fashion parades for the kids, a way of getting the kids involved, … have some stuff prepared for that. I think they really enjoyed themselves getting in there and having a go at modelling.

CATHY: Well, we would like it to turn into a place like, we’ve got our art up on the walls and it sells, people can come in and look through and are welcome to come … need to do, to learn how to do that. Maybe do a business thing on bookwork and how to run business and things like that.

Perhaps the pinnacle event, which displayed this sense of hope, was the ball. Phillipa’s, a Perth-based non-Indigenous CAN WA staff member, quotations describe this. Pride, social cohesion, and strengthening of community identity were also identified by the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee (2004) and Matarasso (2007) as some of the benefits from festivals and other cultural events held in a community.

PHILLIPA: When we arrived the hall looked beautiful. They had it all decorated with black tablecloths, they had balloons in the middle. The women went to collect dry trees, like bushes and they had put them on the side of the stage and had put little lights on them and all throughout they used those flowers, not real flowers, but flowers that are made for the wreaths. The Yok Yoruk women had done all the decorations and at the back they had like an arch full of flowers and that became the place where everyone took photos so everyone was posing. Just first of all walking through and looking at how this place had been nurtured and loved and decorated was great and then everyone was just dressed up. I felt underdressed. We walked in and everyone was in a great mood, and it was just an amazing experience. Keith said that his highlight was when before they went to the ball some people went to the pub just for a drink before the ball and he reckoned the Wadjelas were with their eyes like this … looking, wow!

PHILLIPA: … and the invitation said ‘Looking forward … looking black.’ Such a strong sense of hope, pride, sense of affirming, local identity anyway …

DEIDRE: Even if it’s just a workshop or barbecue or a film night it’s good because it brings the togetherness that’s been there for the Noongar communities for a long time …

LOUISE: Well, I caught the train this morning with a lady who was going to Kellerberrin and we had to sit next to one another. She was having a chat and she was talking about all the arts and stuff that has been going through Keller and she was really impressed and she said she was glad. She said she felt that before there was a divide between say the black fella and the whites here and recently in some of the community events she’s noticed that it is more black and white together.
These shared stories can also tell the ‘truths’ about the literal and ideological absences in social memory in the broader community (Burk, 2006) and deconstruct stories that work in exclusionary ways or that helps to maintain exclusion in the community (Madiyaningrum, 2007). Permanent displays of art or monuments challenges the complicity in the community and ensures the community does not deny, erase or bury markers of local social memories.

DEIDRE: People can learn from it [storytelling], mainstream can learn from it. The main objective I suppose of CAN WA is to bring that about. It’s probably like … they can give but that stepping out into the mainstream community is always a big thing, it becomes intimidating to them.

HEALING THROUGH SHARING
Sharing not only results in having fun but was also part of a healing process for some Indigenous people in Kellerberrin. As Putland (2008) suggests, the arts allows people’s experiences and aspirations to be captured through different modes of representation and knowledge production. It is central to commemorating and making visible silenced memories and stories about life in communities. The public display of art which honours people’s stories, promotes discussion in the wider community, and gains local support for the work (Clover, 2007; Matarasso, 2007).

LOUISE: … it was really fun. It wasn’t like party fun, it wasn’t like manic fun, that kind of ‘woo hoo’ fun but it was fun. Eating lunch together, singing the Eagles together and stupid things like that. Just the whole thing! Wondering if the butterfly [mosaic] is going to work out. How are you going to stick the head on and the head looked really bad. I get the feeling that it was fun and it made them think.

RACHEL: They were quite looking forward to it, to hanging out. We had a lot of fun, it was pretty good. We also broke it up with trips to the pool and lots of laughs and being silly.

LOUISE: Well, that was what was impressive, I don’t know! There must have been something good about what we were delivering, something that they [Liveworks participants] could relate to. Maybe it was exciting or fun or creative. They could relate to something that we were delivering. Maybe it was different and unfamiliar and they wanted to explore those things. We discussed things from ‘How was your weekend?’ to discrimination in stereotype and the fact that people participated in the conversation and again, didn’t walk out, was a sign that they had something to say and they felt comfortable to say it. Maybe the fact that it was women, you know, we’re all women.

SANDY: I don’t know if they’re telling a story or what in their pictures. Some of them try to. I know my partner, he was very stressed and everything when we came up … their healing and that but you can see some sort of sense of pride and a sense of the weight lifting off their shoulders.

Putland (2008) recently wrote that the enjoyment and pleasure that results from participating in the arts is often not emphasised because the focus is on addressing social ills. There is an investment in enjoyment and celebration as a means to building social relations and as a motivator for human action (Matarasso, 2007; Mills & Brown, 2004). In line with these arguments, a focus of CAN WA staff organising workshops was to make it fun.
In addition to this, prior to CAN WA establishing the KIACDU there was not a great deal of assistance and support available for the Indigenous community and local government felt unable to provide it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Before CAN WA, how did the local government deal with issues in the Indigenous community, like the lack of employment or whatever it might have been?

**BILL:** Again it’s not our responsibility. We’d highlight it to relevant government agencies that are responsible for them … We don’t believe we’ve got the resources, we’re not chartered, we’re not resourced to do that sort of work.

This has led to a demand from the Indigenous community in Kellerberrin for tangible issues such as unemployment and financial hardship to be addressed by … that CAN WA staff have to provide services beyond its brief, financial resources and sometimes its area of expertise.

**THERESA:** Ideally the community want jobs, jobs for the men, jobs for the kids, jobs for the young people, and jobs in town so that young people don’t go to Perth and end up on drugs. Of course the whole jobs thing is a huge thing and we’re not a job creation agency but we have been linking up with the employment agencies and the TAFE agencies and we are playing a role … there are a huge number of issues and I guess we can’t address the employment thing directly but we can help with individual and community capacity building that then will have benefits in lots of areas.

**PHILLIPA:** It’s very important that he [Keith] does have the connections and if part of the deal comes that he goes to native title meetings I fully support that. I think that’s critical because land rights are essential to self-determination so to me it’s like I’ve got no qualms. He has never asked me to go to that in CAN WA time. He’s never asked for it, I’ve never offered either. If it comes to that I would probably say that I would support that and I would be happy for him to use the CAN WA time because after all, it’s this organisation’s money, I have to see that in a bigger picture. If Keith needs the money so he can travel there because it’s to do with land rights I really don’t have any problems to pay for even the trip.

**KEITH:** Well, we’ve actually gone outside the scope of what we’re supposed to do. We’re not just an art agency anymore in Kellerberrin we’re also the local Centrelink office. We’re the local welfare office. We’re the local everything office! Basically, we’re viewed as a major resource centre for Kellerberrin so we’ve actually gone outside the scope of the arts but that’s been important too … Well, the funerals for example … a good example people wanting information about how to get funding to pay for their deceased people, people who have passed away. We’ve actually been doing that and directing them to the right

### Addressing social issues

Matarasso (2007) argues that culture is often viewed as secondary issue to social problems in a community. However, he found that culture can also be a way of understanding and addressing problems from within. For example, in Macedonia a heritage project was felt to be more successful in engaging all sections of a diverse community than a previous ‘inter-ethnic relations’ project. This is in part because it did not focus on improving ethnic relations as its goal. Cultural action focuses on community assets, aspects of life cherished by a community and things a community cares about, rather than taking remedial action on problems. While not a silver bullet, community arts practice does ‘have the potential to define and symbolize alternative realities, while working through them can build people’s capacity for and interest in shared enterprise’ (Matarasso, 2007; p.457). This contribution from the arts and cultural development for Indigenous people is described by Cathy in relation to alcohol misuse in Kellerberrin.

We try to encourage the women, there’s a group of women here that like to sit down and drink every day. One of the things we have been trying since we started is to try to get those young women involved in things so that they can see there’s more to life than just drinking every day. Some of them have got good gifts too, they’re really good artists but it’s just we haven’t been able to so far, but one of the women in our group of ladies she’s really turned off alcohol, like she used to drink and that all the time but she’s changed, she doesn’t drink at all anymore and she’s one of our good ones that always comes regularly, and if that can happen to her, then I’m sure it can happen to these younger ones …
agency, in terms of identifying funding. The welfare aspect, in terms of people looking for food vouchers, we’re actually directing people to other agencies and calling agencies on behalf of those people. Elderly people with really high electricity bills for example, people with no gas requesting our assistance. With Centrelink, quite often people come in and talk about different types of payments for themselves and we’re actually sitting down and going through the forms for people. Sandy, of course has been an important part of that process so we’re doing a whole heap of things. The education for example, people have got concerns about the school and people come to us and ask for our advice and assistance in terms of approaching the school and calling a meeting. The school holiday activities, we’ve taken that on board. We’re actually running programs during the school holidays. That’s way outside of our scope of what we’re doing but that’s the sort of things we’re doing on the ground and that’s why we’ve worked quite successfully in Kellerberrin.

However, Phillipa highlights how funding requirements restrict the possibility for other outcomes to be achieved through arts and cultural development.

Now there is some community infrastructure for other agencies to start a negotiation with but the money that we get from the organisations that we get the funds, they’re very specific to certain outcomes and they’re not interested really in the whole picture so a lot of the outcomes that we believe we were getting are culture and art outcomes are just one part of a myriad of outcomes. I now wish we can find someone, let’s say there is some sort of pool of funds for Indigenous projects that look at the holistic, but anyway we’re a long way from that, so we’ve just got to live with that.

They’re [funding bodies] very focussed on outcomes that relate to arts development, which is not a bad thing but its only one side of the story because I know that Keith and Sandy are dealing with people coming into the office, that they come into the office to ask Keith to ring social security or the Department of Community Development and Keith is doing that work. I talked to him and I said ‘Look Keith I support you in doing that work, we’ve just got to be very aware that we need to try and communicate to the community that this is our charter’. But what do we do? I’m not going to say to him ‘Oh, sorry you can’t help these people’ when there is no other service provider or any other presence that is at community level … what are we going to do?

WORKING TOGETHER: INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS RELATIONSHIPS

As indicated earlier, community arts and cultural development work is concerned with empowerment and promoting social change through arts based practice and can be seen as espousing an emancipatory agenda (Boal, 1998; Freire, 1972). This work can be challenging work because it often means negotiating identities and relationships within a broader set of historical relationships that exists within and between communities. In this section we explore some of the specific tensions and challenges that arose in the context of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnership in Kellerberrin. We will consider some of the perceptions and experiences of working in the settings that were created for intercultural collaboration. We focus on the tensions of negotiating relationships from the perspective of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who were involved in the work.

There are several theoretical and conceptual frameworks that can be brought to explore the tensions and challenges of collaborative work (see Sonn & Green, 2006). We have chosen the notion of contact zone to conceptualise the context of doing intercultural work and to identify the challenges and possibilities that arise in that context. Following the work of Pratt (1992), Somerville and Perkins (2003) talk about contact zones, a spacial and metaphorical notion referring to a place where separated people or groups can come together. This is a zone where different groups cross borders into a different space, where our own and other group identities come into interaction. In this space there is negotiation of identities, practices—the deconstruction and reconstruction of ways of doing, knowing and being.

Discomfort and learning in the contact zone

According to Somerville and Perkins (2003), work in the contact zone is difficult and emotional and can leave people feeling vulnerable and at risk. They refer to this as the discomfort of border work in the contact zone. In the quotations below there are different borders crossed and different zones of contact and the difficulties and emotional work required. Louise for example speaks specifically about experiencing the other community as well as recognising her own location (as non-Indigenous CAN WA staff member). The anxiety and disappointment she names is part of the process of negotiating relations.
LOUISE: She came in the morning with a six-pack of grog and cheekily said ‘Do you want a drink?’ and I said ‘no and I’m just not gonna see that. We’re just going to put that away and that won’t exist just for today’ or something like that.

INTERVIEWER: You said that?

LOUISE: Yeah, and I carried on doing what I was doing and then she came back again and said ‘If you don’t want me to do this, if you don’t want me to drink or if I’ve upset you, I can go’ and I found that sad and confronting and all those things because it wasn’t as if she was asking ‘Am I allowed to do this?’ or ‘Will CAN WA do this if I do this?’ or ‘Will I get in trouble?’ It was more like, ‘Nah, I want to know what you think about me doing this’ and I found that really sad and I don’t know why … It was more like ‘Do you care that I drink?’ Do you care that I’m drunk at 10 o’clock in the morning?’ as in ‘Nah, as a person, do you care that me, as this person is doing this?’

LOUISE: I guess it was the disappointment, maybe fear, because there was an element of just a big reality so I guess the reality of it was just frightening for me.

INTERVIEWER: That people would just dump something because it was payday?

RACHEL: Again I suppose it’s just like you get disappointed but you’ve just gotta work with what you’ve got really.

INTERVIEWER: How do you sustain yourself doing that?

RACHEL: Well I suppose you need to make sure you’ve got some debrief support, but it’s definitely an issue for me because it’s getting to a point now where I don’t know how long I can sustain it because it does disappoint, not that it disappoints me, it’s more just that fact that you’re just like okay right … because these programs are expensive to deliver as well, like getting artists and if you think you’re going to get 10 people and then you get 3 people, it’s a bit like, okay right.

Community development agents require an understanding about what marginalisation is, and its social dynamics and history, to be able to support and involve marginalised groups (Lavereck & Labonte, 2000). Working with marginalised groups is not simply about acceptance of the other; there also has to be an awareness of how identities are shaped through interactions, expectations, assumptions, remarks and ways of doing things (Cameron, 2007). Importantly, this suggests that agencies like CAN WA, who position themselves alongside Indigenous and other marginalised communities, have to reflect upon their own philosophical, ideological and pragmatic underpinnings because these are central to collaboration (Sonn et al., 2002; Trickett & Espino, 2004).

The quotations below highlight the complex and situated understanding that develops as people come to learn about the different lived realities and the implications of these for engaging in arts practice in the settings that were created. There is learning about the ways in which our understandings, motivations, and institutional requirements bump up against local realities.

LOUISE: Well, sad, I guess, in the sense that there’s a lot of complacency, there’s a lot of spirit and a lot of guts and when you hear someone speak and they’ve got a lot of passion, but then in their actions and their daily activities, it contradicts maybe what they say … Like you said, we are from different worlds, maybe knowing the amount of alcohol that’s in the community and the domestic spaces that some of the girls have to go to or live in or just accept, things like that, I personally found it sad … I feel maybe the rate of unemployment with the indigenous mob here or the choices of what to do or opportunities; the element of shame that’s involved; maybe getting involved in activities and it seems to result in complacency, being complacent.

THERESA: There was another time I felt a bit in between when we were paying local crew as artists, if they’re playing the didge or something and it always ends up tricky because of stupid ABN’s. So I end up feeling we have to pay people and then we’ve got this friggin’ accounting system and it’s fair enough that actually people want pay close to when they’ve done their thing so I can feel like I’m advocating for this crew with our small bureaucratic system. Sometimes I wish I could be more responsive than I can be, but I also know that it’s the real world and that the people in Kellerberrin need to know that lots of organisations only do pay runs every two weeks, so there’s the mutual learning but I just never want local crew to feel like they’re being taken for granted or not considered because I think that has probably happened for them too much.

Indigenous CAN WA staff also recognised non-Indigenous CAN WA staffs’ level of respect and effort to understand the Indigenous culture and issues facing the Indigenous community.

SANDY: I have no problems with it. I think it’s great. I love working with them. They’re very understanding culturally in the type of people that Aboriginal people are because whether people admit it or not, they are different and the two groups are very diverse, but they are very understanding, the people that I’ve spoken to anyway at CAN WA.

KEITH: Well, I think the Perth staff has got a better understanding of Indigenous issues, of our culture and us as Aboriginal people. Quite often they’ll ring up for advice as well, ‘How should we tackle this?’ for example. We’ve got different other little issues which they’ll ring for and ask for advice and quite often, as Aboriginal people, we’ve been in that position and we’ll say ‘Right, this is the way we believe that you should be approaching this person or this issue’, also the fact that they need to talk to someone. We’re quite happy to go and talk to an Elder for example. One of the Perth staff wants to engage an Elder or someone else in the community. We’re quite happy to go and help facilitate or be the medium between the two and that’s been terrific. That’s why we’ve worked so effectively, just that understanding and the willingness to learn. It’s a two-way learning also in terms of our cultures. There are things that we, as Aboriginal people don’t understand, me and Sandy. We’ll call Theresa and say ‘Right, what do you think we should be doing about this?’ but having that constant daily contact is important because if we didn’t have that, we’d be a long way from where we are now.
Dealing with expectations

Being responsive to different cultures and community conditions often overburdens staff involved in community development projects and can leave them with a sense of disempowerment (Everett, Homstead & Drisko, 2007). The routines of the community and the routines of the agency are different and also require negotiation. If these are not made explicit they can result in disappointment. For example, Everett et al., found that staff had to accept issues such as families’ irregular and episodic participation and that linear and continuous involvement did not necessarily signal successful participation. Similar challenges faced CAN WA staff in relation to their investments and expectations regarding different events or activities.

RACHEL: Yeah, so that was probably the most challenging, and also on the days where it was pay day, where people got on it [alcohol] and then we’re not up for attending the next day, so that was also an issue for us where we then changed the actual schedule so it didn’t fall on the day after pay day.

INTERVIEWER: How did it feel that they wouldn’t turn up because it had been pay day the day before, when you first experienced it?

RACHEL: Yeah, well I suppose it’s disappointing, it’s always disappointing. That’s my main, I suppose my main issue in all of my programs at the moment, is the fact that you’re working with a group that often don’t turn up. Again, that’s a feeling that I had for that particular group that I also have, across the board when people don’t turn, it feels disappointing, because you feel like you’ve put in a lot of energy and you question whether it’s worth it obviously sometimes or whether it’s the right thing or whether it’s what they need or want or...

LOUISE: I don’t think I ever expected 100% turnout or a consistency in it but I guess after a while when people keep showing up and then suddenly they don’t, maybe there is an element of you expecting them to show up but I definitely wasn’t angry, I was sad and yeah, maybe frustrated. An artist came out and yes, maybe frustrated.

Dealing with these challenges calls for creative solutions given broader institutional constraints. These include recognising that partnerships can not be subject to the cultural expectations and the ways of working of one partner, but must be constantly renegotiated in the new space that is formed through collaboration, while also working within external constraints.

KEITH: One of the difficulties is about keeping people interested and motivated, in being able to come along to events in terms of getting people to participate and involved in events. The women I found are the best in Kellarberrin to be involved in activities and projects and that’s from the young women, right up to the elderly women. That’s a very strange thing to look at all the time because quite often, 80% of workshop participants are women so quite a few of the workshops have actually been revolved around silk screening and what the women want.

RACHEL: Yeah, that’s how I feel. But I didn’t feel … it was alright, and again, that’s again the whole process of it. Like you go through all of those feelings and then at the end you have the five girls and you realise it’s not about quantity, it’s quality and it doesn’t matter if you don’t get the 15 through, so then you get that high again, I suppose that’s the thing with this work, it can be quite a lot of highs and lows, frustrating and yet then you get really rewarded when little things happen. Also I think remembering that it is about quality and not necessarily about quantity of people is important as well. But it is frustrating and disheartening at times for sure.

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KEITH: [Indigenous people think] ‘Oh, that’s too hard. We don’t want to do it’, that sort of attitude. It’s very laid back and we have to change that. That’s the other challenge I’d say, we’ll have to change the way we as Aboriginal people think in our communities. The way we can change that is to build capacity of our organisations and our leaders in those towns to be able to challenge their own communities to say ‘Right, we’ve got to do this. Come along and support’.

However, as Kowal (2006) describes, non-Indigenous people working with Indigenous communities can become bewildered when constant reinventing of programs and approaches to be more culturally appropriate does not result in programs and services being accessed or utilised more often.
The friendship in the contact zone

Kowal (2006) details the dilemmas and frustrations non-Indigenous people face when working to address issues within the Indigenous community, some of which have been expressed in the report. There is not room in this report to outline her explanation of how these dilemmas and frustrations develop. However, what we would like to raise is the importance she places on friendship in resolving them. She believes we should not underestimate friendship as a tool that can bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together and allow them to work together to address issues of inequality. She quotes Franz Fanon, ‘Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?’ (1967, p. 231, cited in Kowal, 2006, p.282).

However, it is also important to note that often the training in human services place great emphasis on constructing and maintaining professional boundaries. In some ways these work against effective intercultural work.

Friendship bonds form over time in the different settings that have been created as part of the ongoing community cultural development work (Brodsky & Faryal, 2006). Friendships connote a very different relationship and type of bond that is formed between people compared to those that are shaped by the service provider and community member. In the quotations below there are references to honesty, understanding, openness and co-operation that characterise the way in which people experienced the relationships formed.

RACHEL: The food is really important because it’s also in some ways part of the program where everybody works together to get the food done and clean up afterwards. Especially as part of it we also did the preparation for the Solomon Island. So the girls—we all worked in the kitchen and cooked and that was fantastic really because a couple of them are really into cooking especially and that was really fun to do that. Also we were in there, they were cooking their kangaroo stew and all that as well so it was sort of …

PHILLIPA: Then he [Keith] said to me that he wanted to talk to the Shire Council and tell them that he was sick of the treatment that he was getting. I said ‘Well Keith you do what you feel you need to do, I fully support what you want to do, but don’t put yourself in a situation in which you’re going to find yourself in a worse situation’ but I don’t think he did. I asked him if he’d talked to them and he said no and maybe that was all that he needed so I think we’ve got a quite supportive relationship.

The contact zone and the new space that is created allows one to move beyond the dichotomy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous and to consider the broader context of race relations (Sommerville & Perkins, 2003). The broader context of power differentials and social and historical realities is considered by Louise in her friendship with workshop participants.

LOUISE: When everyone’s standing around weaving together, there’s just a calm, comfortable, good feeling like it’s that ‘fuzzy’ feeling. That was gorgeous and when everyone sings the same song, even though everyone has heaps of shit going on in their lives; that is so different. I will never understand what they’re going through and they will never understand what I go through but the fact that you can all stand there, sing a song, paint a picture, chat about stuff, they were really big highs. For me, they were amazing.

LOUISE: I personally struggled with me coming in here and delivering something and being the person who’s here getting paid to deliver something. I guess I had anxiety about them [Indigenous community] just seeing me as that, where, like you were saying before this notion of friendship, I was going ‘Oh wow, this is really beautiful’ and I guess sometimes I had these moments of ‘Oh no, is this just me projecting this and they’re just looking at me as this person who’s just coming here getting paid, delivering something, leaving and that’s it’ and I don’t know why but I found that sad.

LOUISE: I guess friendship to me was being comfortably silent amidst people that have totally different domestic settings, ethnic backgrounds; just totally different and yet having that comfort, just being together in this space—maybe leaving, or talking about issues … the fact that they would talk freely from discussions that were involved with the Livework program to what they did on the weekend, what I did on the weekend, that kind of friendship. If I was feeling tired I never felt like I had to hold it all together, I was just like ‘I’m feeling really tired’.

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Green and Sonn (2006) identified some ways reconciliation actions may unknowingly and unintentionally perpetuate colonial practices and ways of thinking through the way people think racism should be addressed. Similarly, Moreton-Robinson (2000) describes that although white peoples’ actions may be driven by compassion and good intentions, the discourses and power of whiteness underlying this compassion and these intentions may not be seen. White people being aware of their dominant position and understanding the power relations which underlie their political actions are essential in working across cultural boundaries. This process is delicate, piecemeal and formative; cultural knowledge and awareness cannot be imposed or ‘injected’, but needs to develop within an open a space for shared learning (Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006).

Note from the researchers:
Towards the end of 2007 the Managing Director of CAN WA identified that a staff member lacked an understanding of race and engaged in guided discussion by the first author of this report on power inequalities and the dominance of whiteness.

As noted above, CAN WA as an organisation is already participating in discussions that confront the dominance of and inequality of power between different staff members.
SUMMARY AND POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

CAN WA can be commended on a number of aspects in how it has worked with the Indigenous community and wider community of Kellerberrin. Different aspects are identified and discussed in the three sections of the report.
We draw on these, summarise and raise points for consideration in relation to the three questions presented at the beginning of the report:

• the meanings and processes of community empowerment, particularly in relation to working with the Indigenous community;
• the role of arts and cultural practice in supporting community empowerment; and
• how non-Indigenous organisations can best support Indigenous community empowerment.

MEANINGS AND PROCESSES OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The first question was led to an exploration of the meanings and processes of community empowerment. Interviewees provided examples of empowerment amongst the Indigenous community since the establishment of the KiACDU and there was discussion about the processes that led to this. Highlighted amongst these processes is CAN WA’s support for Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing (e.g., Glover, Dudgeon, & Huygens, 2004; Martin, 2001). This has been achieved by:

• employing local Indigenous staff members to operate the KiACDU;
• allowing the community to identify events (e.g. Badjaling Cultural Festival) and workshops they want and supporting the planning and implementation of them;
• letting go of control, while ensuring the community is still well supported (e.g. the NAIDOC ball);
• being sensitive and willing to understand issues the Indigenous community faces; and
• accommodating the changes or delays these issues may create for planned events, meetings or workshops.

In doing this work, CAN WA has not neglected the broader context in which the Indigenous community is positioned, such as race relations in Kellerberrin. It has provided a link between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community and has endeavoured to open up dialogue between the two groups. As an organisation, it has also been open to addressing the difficult dynamics that emerge between the Indigenous staff and community and non-Indigenous staff.

ROLE OF ARTS AND CULTURAL PRACTICE IN SUPPORTING COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

In relation to the second question, the Indigenous community in Kellerberrin appears to have a great appreciation for what CAN WA and their work in arts and cultural development has done, in terms of honouring and celebrating their identities, offering resources and expertise, and providing opportunities for them to have fun and participate in the broader community. However, they also have a desire for greater economic and employment outcomes from the workshops and events. Economic development is currently a strong focus for Indigenous communities, which is being led by Pearson’s (2000) proposal that economic and social structures are needed for the development of self-sufficiency and empowerment amongst Indigenous people to deal effectively with racism. Although controversial, Pearson’s views are part of a broader debate by Indigenous people and others about the need for better forms of governance (Cowlishaw, 2004a) and the means to economic development by access to land and its associated resources (Altman, Linkhorn, & Clarke, 2005).

The contributions of community development work, such as strengthened social capital should not be seen as a panacea for socio-economic hardship (Baum, 1999). Networks and trust are not substitutes for housing, employment and education, although they may sometimes assist in achieving these things. As such, CAN WA may need to further develop ways in which key issues and desires from within the community, such as employment, can be enhanced by arts and cultural practice. This may not be through typical means, such as the sale of arts and crafts, but may be tailored to different communities. For example, the keen interest the community has in events and festivals might be the focus for Kellerberrin. We understand that there are funding limitations as it is a not-for-profit organisation. However, until CAN WA is funded to address the practical and economic issues of a community, or is supported to do this in collaboration with other agencies, the positive effect it has on strengthening community empowerment will be hindered.

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS EMPOWERMENT

As was discussed earlier in this report, CAN WA is willing to examine the dominance and power it may hold in comparison to the Indigenous community and has taken the opportunity to do this.

The first point for consideration is about CAN WA continuing its dialogue about its intercultural practice and commitment to antiracism. This will include ideological and cultural critique so that attention is drawn to how inequalities of our society are repeated in our own practices (Green & Sonn, 2008). If we do not engage in this critique of our own identity politics and privilege as part of the process of collaborating with Indigenous communities, we can be complicit in reproducing inequality and not contest the systems and practices that exclude.
The second part of the recommendation relates to the dynamics of engaging in decolonising practices and the ways in which Indigenous perspectives are engaged. Cowlishaw’s (2004b) has written about the ways in which non-Indigenous people often self-censor to avoid critiquing Indigenous perspectives. She raised questions about the usefulness of this position and argues that it is often premised on the assumption that Indigenous people are vulnerable and to avoid feelings of guilt. While there may be some non-Indigenous staff members with CAN WA who are willing to challenge Indigenous people within the community and organisation, there are risks that CAN WA will unconditionally support the community without an exchange of responsibility. For collaborative work to be productive and beneficial it is essential to create opportunities and spaces within which Indigenous and non-Indigenous standpoints can be critically engaged in the process of challenging racism and the discourses and institutional practices that sustains and reinforces inequality.

Together these points suggest the following:

- Working alongside indigenous communities require a dialogical approach that is based in and critically considers indigenous ways of doing and being.
- Intercultural work requires examining our own racial and other positions as part of the broader history of race relations and local practices.
- We need to move beyond a static and fixed understanding of self and other to engage conceptualisations of culture that is concerned with lived experiences and that focuses on the processes through which representations, cultural identities and lifeworlds are produced and reproduced, rather than simply seeing Indigenous people as faced with a choice or ability to move between two different worlds (Hinkson & Smith, 2005).

At a minimum this means that CAN WA should consider putting in place structures and processes that will provide support for staff as they engage in the ongoing cycles of reflecting on their own practices that are committed to antiracism and social transformation. Finally as one of the interviewees observed:

PHILLIPA: …if we look through the history of this organisation we’ve always been very close to ‘those issues’ but more on a personal level I feel, I suppose as a migrant to this place, if I’m going to contribute culturally to the development of this place I feel that I absolutely have to support Indigenous communities because culturally that’s the base. It’s like if we don’t know where we come from how are we going to know where we’re going?


REFERENCES


