

Community engagement

Reconnecting through art

Community engagement is the key to public libraries functioning as community centres.

That's the philosophy at Victoria's Yarra Plenty Regional Library (YPRL). Situated in Melbourne's northern suburbs, the library aims to provide access by being inclusive, empowering the community, promoting wellbeing and creating opportunities to connect. The Outreach Department, created in 2005, builds relationships with local organisations as part of the larger community.

When the chance to be part of a community art project emerged in early 2006, YPRL leapt to the challenge. 18 months later, it has brought together people from several community services including YPRL, NEAMI (community mental health rehabilitation and support service provider funded by the state government) and the City of Whittlesea while enjoying the support of local MP Lily D'Ambrosio.

NEAMI Whittlesea's Community Rehabilitation and Support Worker, Marissa Nichols, initially approached YPRL, seeking support for a community art mural. YPRL Outreach Manager, Jane Grace, worked with Marissa on a grant



Participants in the community art project

application which was subsequently successful. MP Lily D'Ambrosio and NEAMI Whittlesea topped up the funding, and following the appointment of Project Co-ordinator Suzi Duncan, the initiative began.

The original mural concept was created by project participant Amanda. Featuring nearly 25 mosaic tile butterflies emerging from the pages of

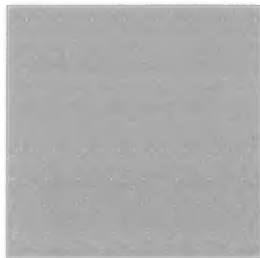
a book, the design reflects the cultural diversity and inclusion of all people in the Whittlesea community.

"Art is an invaluable form of expression, a creative outlet for people who may not be confident to speak or write their feelings", says project co-ordinator Suzi Duncan. "The project is an example to local and neighbouring communities, that people who have experienced mental illness are able to achieve something significant."

There is a wonderful sense of excitement amongst the artists and the library service as the much anticipated end product is made ready to hang in the Lalor Library for the community to enjoy.

For YPRL, the project has created an opportunity to continue meaningful, long term collaborations with all those involved. The artists will leave the project with renewed confidence, skills and awareness providing the means to connect to one another, while making a pathway into the community and the library service.

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