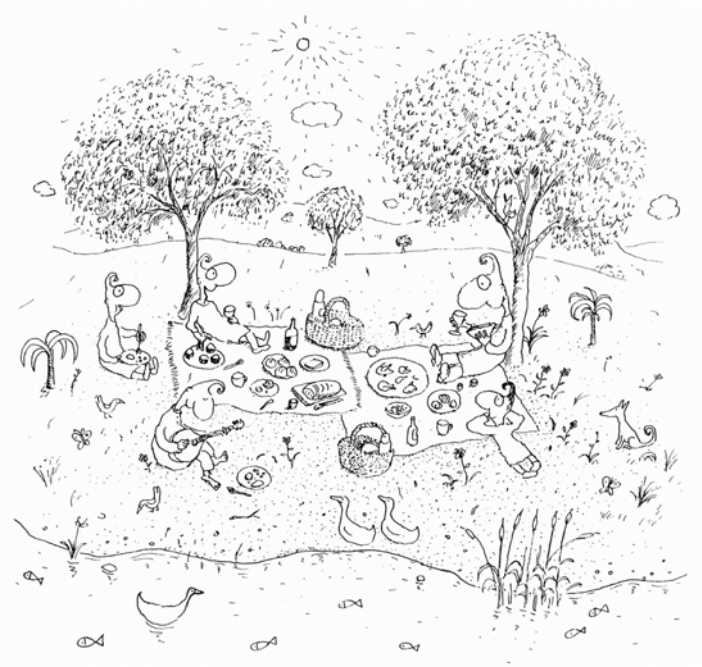
Celebrations

for

Personal and Collective

Health and Wellbeing



(Leunig 2001, p. 6)

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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I am grateful to Michael Leunig for permission to include a selection of his cartoons and poems in this thesis. Michael Leunig is an Australian cartoonist, poet and philosopher. He has been declared a national living treasure by the National Trust of Australia. Through his work Leunig often gives voice to the voiceless and uses the every day to explore the inner self and the wider world we live in.

Undertaking this thesis has allowed me the space to listen, explore, reflect and to find voice. This journey has been supported, frustrated and celebrated by a number of people along the way.

I extend my gratitude and thanks to:

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Everyone who gave took the time to share their thoughts and experiences.
To my lovely friends who provided me with emotional support along the way. In particular,
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Love is the source
Joy is the power
Life is the celebration

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Abstract

Celebrations are pervasive. At a personal level they include birthdays, funerals, weddings, get-togethers, award ceremonies, and parties organised for any number of reasons. At a community level they include faith-based services, public holidays, commemorations and community festivals. These are just a selection. I argue that there is a need to better understand what role celebrations can play to improve health and wellbeing and not just for individuals but for communities.

In this thesis I examine the experiences, context, processes and politics of celebrations and how they contribute to both personal and collective health and wellbeing. Of course, some celebrations make a more meaningful contribution than others. And it is the nature of that difference I seek to understand. The two leading research questions I address are:

- How do celebrations contribute to personal and collective health and wellbeing?
- What is 'healthy' celebration practice?

There are three sections in this thesis. In the first I describe and discuss the Australian context of celebration activities. I also explore definitions of celebrations. I consider celebrations to be an active process made up of both play and ritual. Celebrations seek to focus people's attention, and intention, in a positive way. The resulting celebratory act(s) are a cultural expression of what a particular individual or community values. There are a diversity of celebration forms and practices - open, spontaneous, planned and formal. Each celebration is influenced by, and influences, the context in which it occurs. I will be focusing on celebrations occurring within a community context. A community may be a family, an organization, local community, shared interest group or a whole of society grouping.

In the second section of the thesis I analyse the relationship of celebrations to various dimensions of health and wellbeing. These dimensions include: social connectedness, identity, transitions and lifespan development, and community capacity. A major part of my fieldwork was undertaken in Victoria where I studied 20 community celebrations.

The community celebrations I examined in varying degrees, did positively contribute to personal and collective wellbeing. They did so because they included positive and personally meaningful activities. They explored identity. Celebrations played a role in supporting transitions leading to ongoing healthy development. They provided opportunities for learning; not just knowledge but allowed values to be explored and skills and resources to be gained. They brought people together to interact and fostered a sense of belonging. Celebrations that were health enhancing valued diversity but also explored what unites people. My research confirmed that celebrations can foster our connections; to ourselves, others, the earth, time and the spiritual. They can build relationships between individuals, groups and organizations. They can be spaces that allow for personal and collective healing.

But the degree to which these positive dimensions can be achieved depends on the nature or quality of the celebration practice. And it is the practice of planning and facilitating celebrations that is the focus of the third section of the thesis. Some

celebration practices are health enhancing while others are not. Celebrations can be an opportunity to explore not just ourselves but our communities and how they oppress particular individuals and groups. Many contemporary celebrations do not feel authentic or resonate with people. They often remain at the surface and focus on passive forms of entertainment and the consumption of goods. Deeper engagement can be facilitated through more participatory and creative activities such as dance, playing music, story -making and -telling and ritual; particularly when engaged in with conscious intention.

Celebrations at the individual level can be a positive, affirming experience that is personally meaningful and enables people to move towards their potential. At a collective level they build relationships between the individual, groups and places. They highlight the interconnectedness between all things. And as such they are an integral part of community life.

I conclude by presenting an analytical framework to help understand the nature of celebration practice that is less or more likely to facilitate health and wellbeing. I try to adopt the viewpoint of a practitioner interested in the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. I anticipate this knowledge will stimulate discussion particularly within the health and community sector about how celebration practice can be integrated into the work of health professionals and community workers.

SECTION 1: CONTEXT AND APPROACH

This section introduces the research topic, why it is an important area for consideration and the methodological approach adopted. It also includes a preliminary discussion of the celebration context and research conducted to date.

> Dear Mr Curly,
> I am writing to tell you that I expect to be in Curly Flat for Christmas and look forward to seeing you. The duck is waddling wearily (but steadfastly) in a homeward direction and has got that faraway forbearing in its eye. Naturally I am following and if most things go well we should be moving along the shores of Lake Lacuna by Christmas Eve on the final stretch of our journey back to some peace and quiet.
> The world through which we have been travelling seems to be in the grip of a particular madness. I can think of no other word for it but 'mania', yet many other words are used; such are the many and varied faces of mania. It is called 'passion'. It is called 'excitement'. It is even called 'celebration'. And now whenever I hear words such as energy, entertainment, information, growth, achievement, great, fast, brilliant, talent, vision or more, I am aware of the probability that mania is on the loose and is being rewarded and cultivated, and that the possibility of peacefulness, wisdom and a good life is being further spoiled and neglected. Oh dear, enough of this. It <u>will</u> be lovely to be back in Curly Flat again and to be with you on that beautiful, special, dark night.
> Best pre-Christmas wishes
>
> Yours sincerely
> Vasco Pyjama
> PS Could you please order, from the bakery a large Christmas cake for the duck.
> PPS Could you make that <u>extra large</u> just to be on the safe side. Thanks.

(Leunig 2001, p. 15-17)

Chapter 1: Why Research Celebrations?

> There is an inner pulse within us all that brings about a gathering, as a focus for some basic human needs (Cameron 1995, p. 148).

When I tell people I am writing about celebrations invariably I get one of two responses. Some give me a quizzical look and ask, 'how can you study celebrations?' Other people instantly nod 'yes' and start to tell me about their favourite or most traumatic celebration experience.

This thesis explores contemporary celebrations and the contribution they make to health and wellbeing. While a wide range of celebratory forms are canvassed, particular attention is paid to small to medium community based festivals.

At the opening of the thesis I will share some of my celebratory experiences. They are illuminative for a number of reasons. Firstly, they help explain the growth of my interest in celebrations. And exploring my own personal journey is a way of presenting a critical, self-authoring process. Secondly, reflection on the following personal narrative generated early themes including the emotional power of the celebration experience, the negative aspects of celebrations, the potential of celebrations as both a process for positive personal and community transformation, and why some celebration practices enhance health and others do not. These themes informed the development of the research questions that guide my thesis.

1.1 Remembering celebratory moments

My first celebratory memory is dancing around at New Years.
I must have been three or four.
I just remember dancing, running around, feeling free and joyful.

I remember playing pin the tail on the donkey outside under the carport.
The photos tell me it was my sixth birthday party.

Lots of friends came.
We wore party hats and ate lots of food.

There were my auntie's weddings.
They are not much older than me. We had played together as kids.
I was a junior bridesmaid for the one who was oldest and guest for the second.
I was a bit surprised as I was closer to the second and not the first.
But I was the next in line to be bridesmaid.
There are rules about these things it seems.
I remember not feeling part of it and crying a lot at the second wedding.

I was a bridesmaid again not long ago for an old friend.
Like many people she said her wedding was going to 'be different'.
But I don't think it was.
It was a very expensive wedding, organised with military precision and went off beautifully.
She is an event organiser.

My sister's wedding I enjoyed.
Maybe because it was my tribe and I was allowed to contribute.
A lot of people did.
My friends helped out with the catering.
Others helped out with the drinks, decorating, make-up and hair.
I did the music and a showed a video I had made of their history together.
There was lots of dancing and rejoicing.
They even allowed me to do a blessing.
Her partner's family stayed with them for a few days and we had BBQs and went swimming under the full moon at the beach.

Another old friend is planning her wedding at the moment
…all that organising, stressing out and threatening to 'elope'.
She would but it is her boy who wants the big wedding.

For five years during my adolescence, my weekend job was catering at events.

Mostly 21st birthday parties, football wind-ups, weddings or Christmas parties.
We went to all sorts of venues but mostly local halls or sporting clubs.
It was hard work - setting up, preparing meals, waitressing and cleaning up.
I always remember one night we were on our way to the event.
The new guy was driving and mouthing off about how bad women drivers were.
He then turned right across oncoming traffic.
Our van spun around and smashed into the traffic light pole.
There was food everywhere, lots of chicken pieces.
My boss tried to salvage the apple pies.
Later I threw the pies in the bin when he wasn't looking.
It was raining and I had just had my hair permed.
It was an engagement party.
I ended up serving Chinese takeaway, wet, with frizzy hair and a big bump on my knee.
The best party we catered for was one where they set up a marquee and dance floor in the back garden. Everyone had a good time.

The kitchen at these events was always an interesting place.
Lots of arguing would go on there between the guests and sometimes between the caterers.
Outside there was lots of drinking, eating, speeches.
Some smiles were genuine but others seemed strained.

I remember at the end of Year 10 we had muck up day.
I arrived at school and the school had been completely wrecked, paint everywhere, smashed windows, graffiti. The soccer goals were blocking the passages.
There were no more school outings or extracurricular activities for the next 2 years.
Pity, given none of the kids who did it came back to do Year 11.

During uni when it came to my turn to go to a party, I was often the skipper. And as the sober one, I often stopped my friends from climbing in other people's windows or tearing down street signs, holding them while they vomited and then driving them home.

Family gatherings - we all have them, don't we.
When my family gets together we are loud.
Lots of shouting and complaining though sometimes there is laughing.
I remember the first time my uncle's girlfriend came and was so stressed out by it all she ended up in tears.
Eating is a big focus though this is done pretty quickly.
The girls do the cooking (unless it is a BBQ of course).
The boys usually go watch the footy on television while the girls clean up.
At Christmas there is always lots of presents for the kids.
Noni (my grandmother) still gives presents to everyone no matter how old we get.

I first met Judyth and Beverley in my mid 20s.
They both have a wonderful sense of play.
By that stage I had been to university, travelled overseas and was now living in the country. The country was a place where we made our own fun.
We would go on adventures around the countryside reading tarot cards, planting trees, blessing people's places, celebrating milestones such as the *Bongo* van travelling 100,000 kms.
We would share our wishes and later listen to the stories of our adventures.
The special tea pot always came out at such times.
My favourite ritual was taking a bottle of wine down to the beach, going for a swim and watching the sunset.
At Judyth's 50th we made a phoenix and burnt it.
People danced around to the sound of a didgeridoo.
Terry, Judyth's husband, and I share the same birthday.
We have lots of fun deciding how we will celebrate.
We have done lots of things like para-gliding, motor bike riding and sailing.
Terry was diagnosed with cancer last year.
His treatment has gone well.
I'm glad we can keep planning future adventures.

I like the times where I have worked with people who genuinely like each other.
And places where people are creative at work.

I liked the time we did our strategic planning using tea leaves and the time when I declared International Muffin day and everyone brought in muffins. They laughed when they realised I made it up. Well the girls did, the boys just didn't get it.
That was fun working there.
Much better than my first job in Sydney.
They had lots of morning teas.
Lots more departures than arrivals though.
They were very solemn affairs. Not a lot of laughing.

Last week I turned 39.
I like birthdays now. I use them as an excuse to do exactly what I want.
A group of us went to the Coogee women's baths for a swim and cake.
I then visited my friend who just had a baby.
Her family was visiting.
We had some champagne.
Judyth was staying with me. She gave me a massage in the afternoon.
In the evening a few of us went out for drinks and dinner.
Later I wrote a blessing for myself (what I want to bring into my life).

I always find Christmas, New Year and my birthday a time when I do a lot of reflecting on who I am and what I wish to invite into my life.
I must admit turning 39 was a difficult time for me with no partner, no children.

These days I find I often gravitate to the kitchen when friends invite me to parties.
Maybe it is remnants from all those years catering.
Maybe it is just easier when you are the only single person in the crowd.

My favourite New Year was 2000 and a friend got us a ticket to the special event at the Opera House.
Most of the people there got tickets via the public lottery.
We watched the fireworks and people of all ages danced the night away.
It was joyous, pure fun.

Mardi Gras was fun too.

I have been in the parade twice now.
I couldn't get over how wild the crowd was.
They just want to kiss you.
Last time my friend and I hooked up with a group of three boys from Adelaide.
This was their big 'coming out'.
We made up a special dance which we did all along the parade.

I don't get Australia Day.
Well in some ways I do. People love a day off from work.
Usually I boycott it because I see it as celebrating colonisation.
Don't people see that?
I like the fact that the Aboriginal people have their Survival Day celebration.
But I guess though, it is the only day that has the potential to be about all of us.
That is apart from Anzac Day - but that is really a remembrance day.
I happened to end up at the 75th anniversary in Gallipolli.
There were still lots of diggers then.
They were cheeky and loved chatting up the young girls.
It has been the only time I have had sense of national pride but I did laugh along with the others when our prime minister shed some tears.
I now live on the other side of the country from my family and many friends.
What calls me back are the birthdays, weddings and special gatherings.
The last one was my grandmother, Noni's 80th.
We hadn't all been together for years.
It might be the last time we are.
It brought up all the usual judgements and tensions.
I showed a photo diary of her life and asked people to share what she means to them.
We had three days of gatherings and feasting.
Noni said she never felt so loved.
Though I found out later one aunt was not looking forward to it. Noni wasn't sure she would make it. Another aunt got sick stressing about the organising of it. My sister spent time in the toilets crying. While one cousin felt completely disconnected from everyone.

My mum, Noni and sister get upset if someone doesn't send them a card for their birthday.
I like making up blessings for people and making personalised gifts that recognise the unique strengths they have.
I learnt the importance of beautifully wrapped presents when it was my job to do this for the many Japanese dignitaries that we had to give gifts to as part of an international youth program I participated in.

That was a weird adventure.
We travelled around the Pacific on an ocean liner for three months.
There were young people from fourteen different countries.
There were lots of official functions where we had to wear our uniforms and Akubra hats.
There was a lot we weren't allowed to do.
This was a red rag to a bull for the Aussies who came up with all sorts of activities like having parties in the elevators, in the communal bathing houses and in the life rafts.

I have been lucky, so far I have only been to one funeral.
For an uncle I didn't really know.
Don't know how it will be for me when it is someone who I love.
The funeral for my grandfather will also be interesting.
He hasn't been a particularly nice person during his life, at least to his family.

Everyone always spoke of Woodford as the 'best' community festival.
I finally went. I camped with the thousands of others.
The rhythms of the festival varied over the six days.
It was a place to listen to music and ideas, to dance, to catch up with old friends, meet new people but most of all to be in community.

Occasionally I go to full and new moon gatherings where I dance in community.
I also did a Firedance where we danced and drummed around a fire under a full moon.
I love this type of dance where I can acknowledge my intent and just letting my body do what it wants.

It still surprises me at how people can come together and share in a non-judgemental and supportive way.
It makes me feel alive.

My time out in the desert participating in women's ceremony with Aboriginal elders took me to another dimension of connectedness with the earth.
So very rich indeed.

Sometimes celebrations make me happy.
Sometimes I feel very self conscious and not one of the crowd.
I must admit I have cried myself asleep a few times after a few.
However, they have always been reference points for reflecting on my journey so far and a time when I contemplate the journey ahead.
Mostly they make me feel connected.
They remind me that life is precious and finite.
I am grateful for that.

1.2 Research questions

My childhood celebration memories are often of conflict. Later experiences provided me with a different perspective on celebrations. I got to know people who prioritised celebrating life. The views and beliefs they held were influenced by feminist and ecological discourses. They valued affirmation, openness and respect - for each other, the land and diversity.

One of my favourite ways of celebrating was sharing a pot of tea with these friends. Not any ordinary tea but one using a tea pot that we had collectively made. We would take time during our get-togethers to reflect on our life, acknowledge achievements, mark transitions and let each other know the importance of having each other in our lives. This is when I had my first inkling of the potential value of celebrating. In particular, the value of positive experiences and how they can connect people together.

One of the women in this group decided she wanted to have a celebration of women as part of *International Women's Day*. Women, men and children were invited to contribute in any way they wished. Many did so. It inspired all sorts of creativity. One activity I supported was a 'Goddess' doll-making workshop. This and the other activities that people contributed illustrated for me the potential of the arts and festivals in stimulating creativity and how this could be a powerful healing tool.

I carried this concept into my health promotion practice. I often used a celebratory approach when colleagues came together, welcoming new people, dealing with challenges, and learning about each other's strengths. Reflection led me to recognise that there may be one celebration but a diversity of experiences. Celebrations can bring people together and foster a sense of inclusion or they can exclude. They can be expressions of play and creativity and in this, simply be a fun experience, or they can provide a time and space for deep reflection.

Celebrations soon became a nexus between my interest in developmental and social psychology, history and anthropology, health and wellbeing, and education. As a health promotion practitioner I was aware that health was not just a personal resource but one relevant to communities and organisations. An initial review of the literature found little discussion of this area. It had the potential to strengthen communities. Hence my first research question was:

- *How do celebrations contribute to personal and collective health and wellbeing?*

This question presumes that celebrations do contribute in a positive way to health and wellbeing. I recognise that this premise may be contested and furthermore that some researchers prioritise the task of seeking data to measure the extent to which they either have a positive or negative impact. I think there is value in such empirical research. But in my particular research endeavour I have drawn more on expressive, interpretive and explanatory traditions. I acknowledge the need to be cautious about always accepting self-reporting at face value. But I value knowledge and interpretation derived from subjective accounts of celebrations.

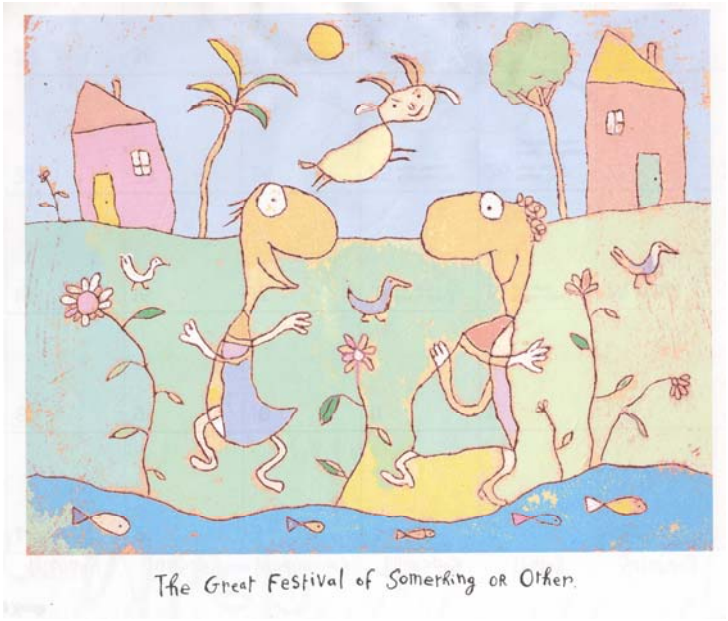
How an individual or community experiences a celebration is an outcome of **who** they are as an individual at this point in time - physically, socially, mentally, spiritually - their prior experiences; as well as the social, environmental and economic **context** in which they are situated; and the celebratory **processes** undertaken.

In particular, I was interested in understanding further what processes and contexts lead to celebrations being a rewarding and healthy experience. Thus my second guiding question was:

- *What celebration practices enhance personal and collective health and wellbeing?*

By practices I do not mean the various forms in which celebrations come. This is discussed in this chapter and chapter four. Rather I mean the attitudes and actions that people who organise celebrations adopt and the impact of these on the celebration experience. For example, do people consciously reflect on how and what they do? This is explored in-depth throughout the thesis. A framework that outlines the key principles and questions to consider in regards to the practice or art of celebration is presented in the final chapter.

1.3 Extent of celebration activity



(Leunig, no publication date available)

> Festivals represent a very tangible manifestation of a community and its culture (Delamere and Hinch, 1994)

While Boissevain (1991) notes there were those who predicted celebration and ritual would fade from the contemporary context, this would not appear to be the case. They are still very much a vital part of modern society. Having said this, the forms and in some instances, functions have changed and continue to do so.

Celebrations are occurring in Australia across a number of settings. In the context of our personal lives there are birthdays (an average of 57,500 per day) and weddings (according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2005) 111,000 weddings were held in 2004). There are ten public holidays in Australia. Australians buy 22 greeting cards on average totaling 440 million each year (Greeting Card Association). In the lead up to Christmas, the capital cities enter party mode and an estimated $14 billion was spent on food, drink and Christmas presents in 2005 in Sydney alone (Holmes, 2005). The *Sydney Morning Herald* devoted its entire November 12, 2005 weekend magazine to 'partying' during the 'silly season' and in the following week a magazine to buying presents. At this time there are also an abundance of articles on

tips for young people to deal with school graduation balls and surviving office parties and family get-togethers.

At a community level, Neil Cameron believes:

> We have witnessed over the last two or three decades a significant increase in community based or government sponsored events that have taken the place of previous practices as a means of expressing community focus and reflexive exploration (2004, p. 19).

ABS (2002a) data from 1995 - 1996 showed some 1,300 festivals were staged in Australia at that time. And 22% of the population aged 18 years and over attended at least one art and cultural festival in the 12 months prior to September 1996. Jeff Goldblatt (2000) notes that the tourism industry has seen a significant increase in the size, scope, length and visibility of hallmark or mega-events. A more recent ABS survey (2004a) identified 176 performing arts festivals of two days length or more were held in 2002-2003, up from 153 in 1999-2000. The original 1999-2000 ABS survey noted some 9.9 million attendances at the events held that year. Another ABS (2004b) survey about work in selected culture and leisure activities indicated that in the 12 months to April 2001, 193,900 people were involved in organising a festival of any type or duration. Event and 'special event' management has become big business. Acodia and Axelson (2005) identified 1,002 job advertisements associated with event management in the major Australian city newspapers over a 12 month period.

In 2002 Michelle Hall from the Local Government Association NSW, speaking at a forum I convened on *'Celebrations for Development and Change'*, reported that in a 1999 community planning and services audit, amongst responding councils *a significant number supported celebrations by,*

- *providing subsidies or donations (45%);*
- *providing advice (27%);*
- *participating in management 27%. [This is compared to participation in the management for sporting areas (17%) and parks and gardens (12%)];*
- *provision of administrative support (26%).*

Further, Hall noted that some councils support celebrations by providing building or office space (17%), providing land (15%) and meeting power and other utilities (13%). These figures are higher than the support for swimming pools. As she stated,

> *…this is because in this day and age they are the only activity where people can come together, be together and celebrate who they are and where they live. Whether it is the local show or a specific theme celebration, it is all about people. NSW Councils are actively undertaking celebration practice, if there is a party to be had, local government will be there in some capacity. From a reduction in law and order issues to the regeneration of a central business district, celebration practice assists local government and its communities to participate in strengthening its own future.*[1]

Most local government councils have events calendars to keep the community informed of local activities including community celebrations (for example, see www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/whatson[2]). Several councils provide grants for community based festivals and regularly support commercial festivals within their location.

In the past few years a number of websites have been established to specifically keep people informed about gatherings and events. For example, www.festnet.com.au focuses on the management and organisation of cultural festivals, particularly in Victoria. The Yahoo group, *Australian gatherings* focuses on environmental and spiritual community gatherings. www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au, the federal government's website focuses on cultural and recreation activities. There are also industry specific websites such as www.fea.org.au for the *Festival and Events Association*, www.artshub.com.au for artists and www.specialevents.com.au for event managers.

The above are conservative estimates of the degree to which celebration is integrated into the fabric of people's lives as it does not take account of the many anniversaries,

[1] Direct quotes from people I interviewed or were involved in workshops I convened will be deidentified and distinguished from quotes gained from the literature or academic presentations by using 12pt and italic fonts.
[2] Except where otherwise indicated all websites listed were live and accessible as at June 20, 2006

club windups and festivals of two days or less in duration, or the informal groups that gather to celebrate during the course of the year. Given this level of activity it is somewhat surprising how little research has focused on how they contribute to health and wellbeing. If health and wellbeing matter, there is a need to better understand what role celebrations can play not just for individuals, but for communities.

1.4 The scope of this research

This research makes an initial foray into the celebration landscape in contemporary Australia. In doing so, it recognises that celebrations are shaped by and in turn shape social context. This research examines the experiences, context, processes and politics of celebrations and how they contribute to both personal and collective health and wellbeing. It will seek in the first instance to map the field, and then analyse contemporary discourses and experiences. Given this thesis seeks to canvas a large body of literature and various forms of celebration practice this has limited the depth of analysis undertaken for any specific issue.

I will examine the data generated in relation to the head (critical thinking), the heart (the mythopoetic) and hands (the practice). Critical thinking enables me to understand power dynamics and relationships at play in regards to the degree they oppress, or foster transformation for wellbeing. The heart enables me to explore the creative possibilities of celebration.

One important body of existing research about celebrations focuses on events. This research is mostly concerned with documenting their social and economic impact. Because there is considerable interest in such impact-measurement studies from planners and managers within the health and community development sectors – I feel it necessary to state here at the outset of this thesis that I am taking a different angle in my research. I focus on the meanings people and communities derive from celebrations. And from that I seek to analyse how various types of celebration practices generate different meanings and experiences. I will also examine contemporary collective celebrations and commentaries about them, to build insight

and understanding about celebration practice that makes a positive rather than negative contribution to key dimensions of health and wellbeing.

I try to adopt the viewpoint of a practitioner interested in the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. There is a growing amount of useful research that describes and discusses the nature of celebration practice, aims and objectives and achievements. This research rarely moves beyond description to become more analytical. It is important to ask why some celebration practices are effective. Here are just two examples of the sorts of questions that practitioners should be interested in:

1. Why do some practices fail to engage a wide range of stakeholders in the community, and why do some succeed?
2. Why do some practices seem rather tired and uninspiring whereas others seem to generate huge amounts of energy, ideas and action?

Without more research about the nitty gritty detail of practice there is a possibility that the type of research undertaken so far may only encourage practitioners to confine their theorizing of celebrations to the level of broad generalisations.

I anticipate the research presented in this thesis will stimulate discussion particularly within the health and community sectors about how celebration practice can be integrated into the work of health professionals.

The next chapter will describe and discuss the methodological approach adopted for this research.

Chapter 2: The Research Approach

Methodology is more than just the way to conduct research.

> It is the sum of all the procedures, processes, constraints, analysis, working assumptions and intentions of the researcher in a particular context for a particular project (McQueen 2002, p. 49).

2.1 Multiple researcher roles

For my doctoral research I have drawn on analysis and data from various experiences and roles. Firstly, I drew on my reflections and analysis of celebrations as someone who plans and facilitates them, whether they be for family, friends, organisations or community. Secondly, I drew on my experiences as a participant-observer in various types of celebrations. Thirdly, I have been a research fellow at the Centre for Popular Education, University of Technology Sydney and convened various seminars and forums. And in this capacity I was the chief investigator from 2003-2005 for a research project commissioned by VicHealth about celebrations and festivals. And finally, I have been a doctoral candidate.

2.2 My influences

Recognising one's own journey and relationship to the research is an important element of qualitative research. This relationship is mediated by the personal characteristics of the researcher including one's knowledge, beliefs and experiences, which have shaped and defined not just the topic and how data is generated but how data is interpreted and represented. The researcher is recognised as an active participant in the research context who both influences and is changed by the research. This requires the researcher to become aware of

> the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform their research as well as their own subject, inter-subjective and normative reference claims (Kincheloe and McLaren 1998, p. 265).

My interest in this topic is a result of both personal and professional experiences. Certainly my values that privilege social justice, diversity and inclusion have led me to explore these within the celebration context. These in turn are shaped by my learning and experiences as a health professional. As a practitioner I am interested in knowing not just the 'why' but the 'how' of celebrations.

This raises two points which have become boundaries for this research. One, given celebration is culturally bound, I have chosen to focus on the Australian (or 'Western') experience as this is the culture with which I am most familiar. I recognise in doing so that there is no one unified 'Australian' culture but a diversity of experiences. I am keenly aware it is not possible to cover all types of celebrations for all groups - religious, ethnic, organisational and so forth, in Australia. So, I have not sought to be representative or comprehensive of all celebrations but rather traverse a diversity of celebrations that dominate the cultural scene within Australia. I recognise that many of these additional celebrations were chosen as a result of my own personal interests. But I paid most attention to celebrations with an explicit health agenda such as those from the *VicHealth Communities Together Scheme*. This scheme seeks to address the social determinants of health, and mental health and wellbeing in particular. I have supplemented these celebrations by examining a selection of large mega events and celebrations such as the Olympics, Australia Day, Mothers Day, Christmas and the *Woodford Folk Festival* (see www.woodfordfolkfestival.com).

Secondly, I am aware that language is power and can either provide or restrict access to knowledge. As a public service employee who is concerned with improving access and equity I have a commitment to 'plain English'. I have sought to adopt such an approach in this thesis. In doing so a more narrative style is adopted. This again, is more in keeping with expressive or phenomenological traditions. In taking such an approach I also seek to include my voice in this research which actively involves writing in the first person and actively making 'I' statements rather than adopting the more traditional academic approach of writing in the third person.

2.3 My journey

This thesis is the result of my efforts 'to piece the picture together, to make sense of it all'. I have sought inclusion and 'wholism' rather than reductionism. In doing so - to provide a space for (re)weaving of some of the many strands that specialisation has resulted in. The picture is not complete but an emerging one. In taking such an approach I recognise that I have sought breadth across this topic area rather than depth. I do acknowledge this can leave me open to criticism by the many researchers who value focused research approaches. This was a conscious decision in response to the lack of prior research that has sought to examine the relationship between celebrations and health, and in particular the nature of practice. I was interested in traversing the terrain, mapping the territory so to speak. This I hope will assist in setting a research agenda. I look forward to others using this research to identify further research opportunities be they broad or specific.

My research journey has been transformative. It is not I believe, possible to participate and consciously reflect during four years of research and not learn and grow. In writing this thesis and seeking to synthesise the data I have a much more comprehensive view of the role of celebrations in contemporary society. The continual dynamic interplay between research, practical application and personal development has transformed my knowledge, values and practices.

2.4 Bodies of data

Carl Jung asserted "ultimate truth, if there be such a thing, demands the concert of many voices" (in Braud and Anderson 1998, p. 36). I made a point in my research to draw on 'many voices'. Community psychologist, Bill Berkowitz recognises that much evidence in community work is indirect and scattered (2000, p. 335). Subsequently, I have undertaken research in multiple contexts. Both primary and secondary sources of data were generated and accessed. These can be broadly grouped into:

Primary sources

- interviews and conversations with celebration organisers and participants;
- field visits to community celebrations including those involved in the *VicHealth Communities Together* funding scheme; and
- practice-based knowledge.

Secondary sources

- academic research literature;
- contemporary discourses reflected in 'popular' media such as newspapers, internet, books, and conference papers, professional development forums; and
- conferences.

2.4.1 *Communities Together* funding scheme

I studied 20 community celebrations in Victoria funded as part of the *Communities Together* scheme provided by VicHealth (refer to appendix one for a brief description of each). Depending on the timing of each community celebration, I undertook a:

a. retrospective study of a community celebration already completed;
b. prospective analysis incorporating one or more celebration cycles; or
c. combination of retrospective study of previous community celebrations and prospective study of subsequent celebration(s).

I conducted a total of 86 face-to-face or telephone interviews, 15 of which were in-depth interviews. These included a sample of 66 organisers or participants. I planned and convened six focus groups involving a total of 24 people were held with organisers, volunteers and artists. A further 16 interviews were conducted with community members or community observers such as health staff, community workers, local government workers. E-mail correspondence was used to follow up and clarify points. The face-to-face interviews were transcribed. The key areas the interviews explored were:

- meaning and identity;
- valuing diversity;

- community capacity including the ability to plan, implement and evaluate community based initiatives and, relationship development;
- social connectedness and inclusion;
- negative impact of celebrations;
- context and practice incorporating how power is negotiated and the history of local community celebrations; and
- cultural development including creativity, self-expression and showcasing local skills.

I attended six community celebrations in Victoria and observed seven others via videotape recordings. I reviewed funding applications, evaluation and acquittal reports, and other material produced such as letters to the editor, participant feedback read during on-site visits or sent by the organisers. I was a member of a panel that assessed the funding applications. I attended five funding assessment meetings.

Interviews were transcribed, literature reviewed and summaries produced for each festival under the following headings:

- Description of the community and the festival context.
- Description of the festival including the history, guiding values, aims, and what happened.
- The contribution the festival made:
  - in achieving participation in meaningful activities;
  - to building community capacity;
  - in fostering self-expression, creativity and showcased local skills;
  - in facilitating social interaction; and in
  - valuing diversity.
- Reflections on practice
  - description of practices undertaken including the degree to which they were community based and controlled; and
  - key lessons learnt.
- Where to from here
- Comments

I planned and led a full-day workshop with celebration organisers. This provided an opportunity for practice knowledge to be generated and shared. The preliminary findings were also fed back to the sector for comment. Four community organisers involved in the research presented on their community celebration. Twenty six people from across Victoria attended this workshop.

In accordance with ethical requirements all interviews conducted were de-identified to the degree that only the celebration and role of the interviewee is reported.

2.4.2 Academic literature

In chapter three I describe the various bodies of literature I have drawn upon - event management, anthropological studies of ritual and ceremony, health promotion, 'New Age' accounts of ritual and celebration, performance studies, theological studies of ceremonies, community cultural development and organisational learning. While these bodies of literature provide some insight, they offer vague and ambiguous definitions of the key terms - celebrations, ritual, ceremony and make it difficult to isolate celebratory forms from other forms of gatherings.

2.4.3 Contemporary discourses

I convened the following research seminars and forums:

- an on-line forum about evaluating celebrations during the month of November, 2001. Participants included academics, practitioners, educators and health workers.
- a one-day forum on *Celebrations for Development and Change* was held in March, 2002. It included nine presentations, a networking/information exchange session and a panel discussion.
- a conference stream about celebrations at the December, 2002 *Education and Social Action Conference* at the University of Technology, Sydney. This involved nine presentations covering topics such as Australia Day, seasonal ritual, celebrations and health, contribution of feminism, multicultural celebrations, environmental celebrations and a general workshop which I facilitated.

- I facilitated a small group discussion with five participants on 'evaluating community festivals and celebrations' at the *Theatre of Celebration Event Management Regional Conference* held in Sydney in March, 2003.
- I facilitated a workshop on community celebrations with approximately fifteen community leaders as part of the Marrickville community leadership project supported by the Centre for Popular Education at the University of Technology in June, 2003.
- I facilitated a discussion on celebrations and health for the NSWHealth Multicultural network in August, 2005. There were seven participants.
- I co-organised a seven member panel discussion on *Spirituality and Health* at Prince of Wales Hospital in October, 2005.
- I co-organised a workshop on *Creating Simple Rituals in Health* at Prince of Wales Hospital in October, 2005.

These forums formed a core part of self reflection cycles where emerging themes and issues could be (re)examined.

Internet information exchange forums monitored included:

- *Festnet* sponsored by Regional Arts Australia (2003 onwards)
- *Australian Gatherings,* a community driven Yahoo group (2005)

Professional development forums I participated in:

- *Creative Writing - Stories and Myth* conducted by the International College of Celebrancy, in Melbourne in August, 2004
- *Module One: The History, Nature and Development of Ceremony* provided as a distance learning module by the International College of Celebrancy (2004)
- *Roads of Transformation: Mythopoetic Pedagogy in Educational Practice*. A two day workshop conducted in Melbourne in July, 2005

I read a range of literature including refereed journals, the internet, newspapers and in particular, the Saturday edition of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and Saturday edition of *The Australian*, non-fiction books, popular magazine articles, festival reports and, films and television shows.

I also conducted 16 interviews with celebrants, artists, academics, government workers, health workers and event managers. Plus I discussed informally with over thirty people who I met professionally and socially over the 2002-2006 period, what and how they celebrated. Notes were taken during these interviews. Some were videotaped and notes written based on the videotape. The interviews were examined in relation to the previously mentioned themes. New themes were also identified.

2.4.4 Practice-based knowledge

Not only have I been a researcher and observer of other people's celebration experiences, I have personally participated in and organised celebrations. And in the last four years I have analysed my experiences and written about my reflections.

The range of personal 'exclusive' celebrations attended during a four year period included six weddings, seven birthday gatherings, two funerals and one, newborn welcome ceremony which I facilitated.

In addition to the 20 festivals funded by *VicHealth* that I studied, I also observed and participated in the following community festivals:

- Wauchope *Bago Stories,* 2002-2004
- *New Years Eve* at Sydney Harbour (Sydney Opera House public gathering in 2000 and general viewings in 2001, 2002 and 2003)
- *Sydney Mardi Gras* (2001, 2003)
- *Organic Dance* full moon, new moon, solstices and equinoxes (2003-2005)
- *CERES Kingfisher Festival* (2002)
- *Confest* (2005)
- *Woodford Folk Festival* (2005)
- *Firedance,* Turtle Camp (2005)
- *PaGain* equinox and solstice gatherings (2002-2003)
- *Gather the Women Sydney: International Womens Day* (2003)
- Local Government festivals including the *Surrey Hills Festival* (2004), *Glebe Community Festival* (2003), *Norton St Festival* (2002), *Victoria Park Festival* (2002)

- Darling Harbour based festivals including the *Japanese Festival* (2002), *Chilli Festival* (2003), *Mind Body Spirit Festival* (2005), and *Organic Festival* (2005)
- *Desert Women's Ceremonies* held on traditional lands in central Australia (2006)

I have been a:

- facilitator and participant of monthly *Soul Food* gatherings (2005-2006); and a
- working group member of *Ecoliving* events team and supported a winter solstice gathering and *Gardening Australia* expo (2002).

2.4.5 Conferences

I attended a number of conferences including *Synergy*, an art and health conference held in Sydney, 2003; *Art of Dissent*, a community cultural development conference held in Melbourne, 2002; the *FECCA National Conference* which focused on diversity and multiculturalism held in Canberra, 2005; several *International Event Management Conferences* held in Sydney, 2003 and 2005; and *Theatre of Celebration* an event management regional conference held in Sydney, 2003.

I also read conference proceedings for the *International Event Management Conference* held in Sydney in 2000, the World Health Organisation's *International Health Promotion Conference* held in Melbourne, 2004; and the 2002 *Australian Regional Arts Conference*.

2.5 Analysing the data

My qualitative research methodology was underpinned by the following assumptions:

- there are multiple constructed realities;
- that the researcher and the subject are interdependent;
- knowledge is time and context specific;
- it is useful to describe and interpret events in order to answer the questions, rather than to control events in an attempt to establish cause and effect; and
- research is value bound (Higgs 1998, p. 1-2).

One of the key strengths of qualitative research is that it allows for the exploration of relationship. As Stewart explains:

> it allows for close, contextual and detailed observation of the transactional ways people and settings, individuals and culture, role and identity relate. It also allows theory and lived experience to come together in a way that allows for paradox, complexity and qualification (2000, p. 733).

Furthermore, qualitative research provides the opportunity to research people in their 'natural' settings and contexts. It allows for exploration of interpretations and meanings and hence moves towards gaining a deeper understanding of celebration practices. Drawing on a typology proposed by Peter Willis (2000) my research:

a. takes an *explanatory* approach which categorises the things that people do and explores their causes, the meanings people attribute to them and the interests behind them;

b. is underpinned by an *interpretive* orientation that recognises humans live and act in a social context and people create their reality. An interpretive orientation interprets process, meaning, relationships, perspectives and contradictions of particular contexts and social positions;

c. adopts a *critical* analysis of cultural, social and political context and examines what motivates people to act, how power is mediated in society and the implications for who is privileged and who is not; and

d. is *expressive* by paying close attention to the detail of everyday experiences in celebrations and giving voice to these.

Attention was placed on exploring each of these dimensions within this thesis. Although this research primarily focuses on the expressive and explanatory dimensions in the first instance, and secondly on the interpretative and critical dimensions. That is, primary attention was given to giving voice to mine and other people's experiences – people who create and participate in celebrations. Themes

were generated and used to explain the various dimensions of celebrations. A focus on interpreting what people do and say about celebrations allowed for the complexity and multidimensionality of celebrations and celebration practice to be reflected upon. Attention was also given to critical reflection particularly about celebration practice rather than the evaluative needs of policy makers. Critical reflection on the context also allowed for greater understanding of how power is accessed and negotiated within celebrations. As such I sought to adopt an integrated research approach that strives towards wholistic interpretations that are inclusive and represent diversity. This allows for knowledge to be continually revisited and remembered in ongoing learning spirals. Piantanida and Garman (1999) present the concept of iterative cycles where ideas associated with the dissertation are visited and revisited; there is a cyclical interplay between private ruminations and thinking aloud with others; a continual interplay between personal knowledge grounded in experience, formal bodies of knowledge as represented in the literature, and information gathered during the inquiry; preparation of written documents and informal and formal review of those documents. Such an approach is consistent with the traditions of grounded theory.

There are many celebrations. And for each celebration there are many stories and experiences. I was interested in exploring the celebration landscape from different perspectives and depths, from the broader birds eye view of society and community, down to the personal experience. I continually reviewed the same topic from differing points in the spiral, holding different perspectives at the same time - personal and collective. Practically this has led me to revisit themes during this thesis in differing chapters from differing angles or perspectives. By exploring 'in relationship' a synergistic learning was possible. Such an organic form of inquiry acknowledges, "that every research study has an inherent and expanding nature which may be realised through subjective and intuitive methods" (Clements, Ettling, Jenett and Shields, no publication date listed). This provides an opportunity for critique and intuition to intertwine leading to the possibility of new associations and connections.

Subsequently, I was interested in learning from anything that promised to contribute to a full and rich depiction of the studied topic, recognising that wisdom can be found in a range of sources. From 'without' through reading the wisdom of others through published research and popular texts, and through listening and actively engaging in

dialogue with others. It also recognises wisdom can be gained from going 'within' through conscious critical reflection and through direct knowing gained from exploring one's own depths, both the expressed and the embodied.

Such an approach too allowed for both planned, particularly in relation to reviewing the community celebrations funded by the *VicHealth Communities Together Scheme*, and opportunistic inquiry based on information provided by people I met, articles I read in the newspaper and so forth. This approach too, allows for the exploration of the topic from first, second and third person perspectives ('I-You-It') and moving towards a collective experience (We).

The next chapter will begin to address the findings of the literature review.

Chapter 3: Scoping the Literature

While celebrating is a long held tradition within societies, there is only a moderate amount of academic literature that includes direct analysis of the health benefits or otherwise of celebrations. Bowdin and Williams (2005) acknowledge that many of the reflections on contemporary celebrations such as festivals remains internal to the organising group, with unpublished acquittal report summaries entering the public domain only as press releases or reports.

Much of the literature that informs my research is therefore indirectly related to celebrations and I discuss it throughout the thesis. Relevant literature is found in the cross-over between social science disciplines including history and anthropology, the arts, health, community development, events, popular education and spirituality. In this chapter I will sketch those bodies of literature that have a more direct concern with celebrations. Please bear in mind that the literature will be revisited and expanded upon in subsequent chapters.

With the support from staff at the Centre for Popular Education I searched the following databases - Australian Digital Thesis Program, Kenetica, Leisure Tourism Database, CINAHL (nursing/medical database), Academic Search Elite 1985, Australian Public Affairs Information Service, Sportdiscus, Sociological Abstracts 1963, Medline and the UTS Library catalogue. I used the following key words - festivals, celebrations, creative community, community building, health and spirituality, events and community, festivals and health. This literature review built on the one completed by The Globalism Institute at RMIT University in Melbourne. Their review commissioned by VicHealth, examined the links between community celebrations and community development and health or wellbeing (McQueen-Thomson, James and Ziguras, 2004). They identified a body of work, mostly evaluation reports, that examined community and cultural development, arts practice, and festivals in particular. They concluded that community celebrations can promote community development and wellbeing.

3.1 Contributions from anthropology, philosophy and sociology

Anthropologists such as James George Frazer (1996), Claude Levi-Strauss (2001), Arnold Van Gennep (1960), Mircea Eliade (1968) Max Gluckman, (1965), Clifford Geertz (1973) Bronislaw Malinowski (1974) and Victor Turner (1969, 1982a) have examined the functional role of ritual within society. Much of their understanding is based on ethnographic studies. More recently, Neil Cameron (2004) as part of his masters thesis employed a functionalist analysis and proposed four major categories of ritual as defined by their purpose - transformation, reinforcement, transcendence and catharsis. He argues reinforcement rituals are merely ameliorative and tap into already existing familiar frames of reference and belief systems. This is in contrast to transformative rituals which move participants into a new set of feelings and ideas they did not have access to before the ritual - for example, rites of passage such as weddings. While Cameron argues reinforcement rituals have prescribed and expected forms he goes on to suggest those that foster transcendence do not and cites festivals of belief such as sacred and cyclical festivals which occur at specific times during the year, festivals of misrule such as *Mardi Gras*, civic festivals or festivals for special interest groups as examples. Those that are cathartic are seen as assisting individuals to deal with crises - for example, funerals which assist dealing with death, grief and loss.

Cameron acknowledges these categories are not definitive or mutually exclusive. My research examining small to medium sized community celebrations and festivals in Victoria found that they are multi-functional and multi-experienced. This perspective is more in line with postmodernist approaches which recognise the diverse, dynamic and culturally embedded nature of celebrations. Barbara Myerhoff and Ann Arbor in commenting on functional approaches to understanding ritual came to the conclusion they may

> mean different things at different developmental levels within a society, at different points within a personal chronology, and within the meaning systems of two or more persons within the same culture (1992, p. 55).

They present a view that enables ritual to be less fixed and more continually emergent. Celebrations are influenced by the social context as well as act to influence the broader context in which they are located. Frank Manning viewed celebrations "a 'text', a vivid aesthetic creation that reflexively depicts, interprets and informs its social context" (1983, p. 6).

Philosophers and sociologists such as Emile Durkheim (1971), Mikhael Bahktin (1984a, 1984b), Gusfield and Michalowicz (1984), Don Handelman (1998), Joseph Campbell (1991a) have undertaken interpretive analysis of symbols and social structures, both traditional and contemporary. Their work will be described and discussed in different parts of the thesis.

Michel Bakhtin's studies of Carnivale (1984a, 1984b) celebrations of the European middle ages led him to argue that they were intentionally created to foster resistance to oppressive political practices and authoritarian social mores. Others such as Arnold Van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1969, 1982b) describe how celebration and ritual can create spaces apart from the everyday where differing norms can apply. More recent authors such as Catherine Bell (1992), Ronald Grimes (2000), David Kertzer (1988), Barbara Myerhoff (1977, 1982, 1992) and Frank Manning (1983) have deconstructed power within rituals. However, much of this research has been from observational data and has not paid much heed to the voice of participants in celebrations. This research will be discussed in later chapters.

3.2 Contributions from mythopoesis, hermeneutic and cosmological approaches

Mythopoetic and hermeneutic approaches have highlighted how story, symbol, imaging and other body based experiences are used to connect with our emotional selves and their potential educative and transformative value (Leonard 1983; Willis, 2004). I will write more about these approaches in later chapters. Cosmogeneic approaches which explore the ongoing creative activity of the universe provide a nexus between the 'traditional' wisdom of sages and modern science (for a brief

introduction see Livingston 2005, p. 45-48). Such approaches seek to reinforce the interconnectedness between individuals and the contexts in which they live - family, community, planetary. They view celebration as a process, as a way of being in the world (Hallowell, 1995) - being positive, living in gratitude, to honour the ordinary as extraordinary and to live in the present (Swimme and Berry, 1992). This is something Australian cartoonist, poet and artist Michael Leunig does. The following is but one of his poems that expresses this approach to life.

> We rejoice and give thanks for earthworms, bees, ladybirds and broody hens; for humans tending their gardens, talking to animals, cleaning their homes and singing to themselves; for the rising of the sap, the fragrance of growth, the invention of the wheelbarrow and the existence of the teapot we give thanks. We celebrate and give thanks.
> Amen (Leunig 1996, no page listed).

3.3 Contributions from event management

Event management as a field of practice and study has grown in the last twenty years. Celebrations can be viewed as one type of event and will be defined further in the next chapter. A review of research about events conducted between 1990 and 2001 by Hede, Jago and Deery (2002) found there has been a focus on studying the economic value of sports-based special events. McQueen-Thomson, James and Ziguras found in their review that

> … the majority of the research being done on festivals and celebrations comes out of tourism studies, and is concerned with economic impacts and ways of making events more successful. Social impacts are considered within this field of work, however, for the most part, this is only to provide information on how to make a festival or celebration acceptable to a community, or to understand how an event is received…It is crucial to recognise that community celebrations tend to have a deep contextual component, and understanding this requires a broad cultural and historical engagement (2004, p. 7).

In the past few years there has been increasing interest, even within the emerging events sector, to more closely examine the social impact of community festivals. For example, the theme of the *Third International Conference on Event Management* held

in Sydney in 2005 was on the 'triple bottom line' - the social, environmental and economic impact of festivals. While this is encouraging, much of the research that addresses the social impact of festivals and events utilises quantitative methodologies which provides little insight into the relationship between community celebrations, social contexts and practice. As a review by Fredline, Rabould, Jago and Deery (2005) found, these studies have in the main, used self-reported survey instruments to quantify local perceptions. They go on to outline how others have sought to assess social outcomes using 'objective' measures including placing monetary value on social impacts. Fredline, Deery and Jago (2002, 2005) are interested in developing a series of indicators against which an individual event can be measured and comparison between events can be conducted. They are currently working on a tool that will aggregate across economic, environmental and social indicators to produce a composite score. For some time Tom Delamere in Canada (1994, 1997, 2001) has sought to develop a quantifiable scale to measure resident attitudes towards the positive and negative social impact of community festivals. His scale is being developed through the use of nominal group techniques involving residents, reviews of the literature and a review of the survey instrument by an expert panel. Subsequent studies will assess the reliability and validity of the scale.

Mayfield and Crompton (1995) found the three most important reasons communities staged a festival was community pride, family fun and entertainment and to enhance tourism. Gorney and Busser (1996) found participation in an Olympic styled corporate event had a positive impact upon perceptions of community and recommends such activities to the business sector. Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis and Mules (2000) gave some minor consideration to 'intangibles' of special events and conventions in their framework assessing economic impacts. They identified three categories of social benefits as community development, civic pride and event product extensions such as training programs and scholarships.

Janine Molloy (2002) found that festivals develop a confidence, pride, optimism, good community spirit, provided enjoyable activities and fostered a sense of hospitality. Ros Derret's early work (2003) discusses how festivals demonstrate a community's sense of place. More recent work (Derret, 2005) has examined stakeholder influences and relationships. She found that factors such as communal

memory, willingness to work collaboratively, organisational traditions and experience influence the long-term viability of festivals.

3.4 Contributions from theology

Another body of relevant literature draws on theological studies. Most of the theological literature is faith based. Some contemporary theologians such as Mathew Fox (2000) seek to engage in interfaith dialogue. He seeks to find the commonalities between the texts of the differing religions. He too is interested in the link between spirituality and science (Sheldrake and Fox, 1996). In Australia, academics such as David Tacey (2000, 2003a) and Gary Bouma (2002) discuss the increasing trend in Australia towards spirituality as opposed to religion (Bouma, 2002). This trend has led members of contemporary faith based traditions to adopt inclusive approaches to liturgy and ritual (McRae-McMahon, 2003). Under this broader focus of spirituality it is interesting to note the prolific amount of discussion in the popular literature genre often labelled 'New Age' where traditional pagan and shamanic rituals and practices are being revisited particularly in relation to personal and community spiritual growth (for example, Biziou, 1999; Farmer, 2002; Heerens-Lysne, 1995; Livingstone, 2005; Mindell, 1993; Pollack, 2000; Starhawk, 1989).

3.5 Contributions from health

There are a small number of academic publications which have focused on the therapeutic aspects of ritual (Coombs and Freedman, 1990; Markson and Fiese, 2000; Roche, 1994; Rogers and Holloway, 1991). However, a substantial amount of material in this area is in the form of books (for example, Imber-Black and Roberts, 1992 focus on the family context) and unpublished reports. Brief correspondence with leaders in the health promotion field including Professors, Ron Labonte, Penny Hawe and Fran Baum indicated little research or prior interest in celebrations as a health enhancing activity.

Insight into health enhancing contexts and practices can be drawn from the disciplines of family therapy, women's health, community development, mental health and health promotion (for example, Labonte, 1997; Minkler, 1997; Parker, Radha, Horton, Shelton, 1996; World Health Organisation, 1997; World Health Organisation, VicHealth and University of Melbourne, 2004). But there is little that speaks directly to celebrations.

3.6 Contributions from the creative arts

Celebrations can be broken down into their contributing creative elements such as the arts, ritual, music, dance and other creative forms of expression. A review of the health benefits of community arts practice conducted by The Globalism Institute, RMIT University found a substantial body of work supporting the positive health impacts of arts practice.

> Many studies - especially those dealing with people on the social margins or groups at risk - describe a rise in self-confidence and self-esteem…There is even a wider body of evidence for the positive role of the arts in providing social support, building social capital and encouraging urban renewal (McQueen-Thomson and Ziguras, 2002, p. 3).

An evaluation of the *VicHealth Community Arts Participation Scheme* (2003a) found that the arts made a contribution to mental health through valuing diversity, enhancing social connectedness and capacity to implement mental health promotion activity, and fostering partnerships. Mills and Brown (2004) found the arts, and community cultural development in particular, can contribute to both individual and community wellbeing and can support community strengthening strategies undertaken by government departments. For example, the arts can make a contribution to strengthening knowledge, engagement, social capital and leadership. They suggest community cultural development process can play a role in supporting people to critically reflect about their experiences. The value of the arts in facilitating learning amongst young people was also a finding of a large scale research project involving seven research teams in the USA which was documented in *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (Fiske, 1999).

3.7 Contributions from the popular media

There has been a great deal of social commentary on current trends in celebration practice in the popular press such as newspapers and magazines. Monitoring of the weekend editions of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian* newspapers over a four year period highlighted constant reporting of festivals, events and other celebratory type activities such as New Year Eve parties, latest Christmas or birthday trends, the rise of divorce parties, commentary on mega events such as *Australia Day* and the *Olympic Games* or how we celebrate the Australian identity. In addition, there is a constant stream of articles in 'women's magazines' providing tips and recipes for celebrations such as Christmas, Easter, party planning, or columnists sharing their experiences. There are 42 bridal magazines in Australia (van den Nieuwenhof, 2005). In line with this extensive interest a 'Google search' of the internet yields a plethora of sites that examine celebrations, holidays, party planning, food for special occasions, cultural or holiday traditions, event businesses and so forth.

3.8 Contribution of organisational and business discourses

One of the few books that examines celebrations from an organisational and workplace perspective is an American book *Corporate celebrations: play, purpose and profit at work* by Terence Deal and M.K. Key (1998). Although many business development books do make reference to the value of celebration (for example, Kouze and Posner, 1999, 2003; Weinstein, 1996).

3.9 Analytical accounts of celebration practice

There are few academic studies or formal reflections by practitioners. Reflections and discussions are generally restricted to conferences including the *Regional Arts Conference* hosted by Regional Arts Australia (see www.regionalarts.com.au), conferences convened by celebrant associations (for example, see

www.celebrancy.com) and the *International Event Management Conference* hosted by the Centre for Event Management at the University of Technology, Sydney (see www.acem.uts.edu.au) and religious or spiritual based conferences. Community cultural development publications may include articles on practice such as the *Artwork* magazine produced by Community Arts Network South Australia or the *Australian Special Events Magazine* produced by Australasian Special Events (see www.specialevents.com.au). Neil Cameron, is one of the few festival organisers to have written analytically about his experiences in his books *Fire on the Water* (1993), the *Maleny Folk Festival* (1995) and in his masters thesis titled, *New Alignments in Ritual, Ceremony and Celebration* (2004). Two books have been written exploring the *Sydney Mardi Gras* experience (Carbery, 1995; Wherrett, 1999) which include practitioner reflections. Books have also been written on ritual practice by civil celebrants (for example, see Messenger, 1999), religious leaders (for example, see McRae-McMahon, 2003), pre-Christian traditions (for example, see Starhawk, 1999) and modern day spiritualists (for example, see Farmer, 2002).

The summary of the literature presented in this chapter and other associated literature on health will be described and discussed further in subsequent chapters. The next chapter defines 'celebration' for the purpose of this thesis.

Chapter 4: Celebrations: Definitions and Forms

Celebration is an often used but little defined term. The Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary defines *celebrate* as,

> an intransitive verb keep festival or commemorative event especially by (eating and drinking), making widely known, praise; (in part, participate) famous; duly perform (rite etc); of priest (officiate at Mass or Eucharist).

As a verb 'to celebrate' highlights the act of, or process of, celebrating. What is produced, the noun, is a celebration - a product.

The above definition suggests that celebrations are seen to have positive attributes as they are associated with festivity and rejoicing. But many view celebration as special or 'out of the ordinary' events, while others and theologians in particular, view celebration as an active way of being everyday.

4.1 Celebrations, ritual and play

> Official holidays and national celebrations punctuate our time, stop the flux of our days, and remind us to pay attention to the rhythms and seasons of our lives (Keen, no date of publication listed).

The term celebration is often used interchangeably with the notion of ritual. It is also used interchangeably with festival and special event. But here I will discuss the relationship between celebration and ritual. The properties, processes and functions of ritual and to a much lesser extent celebration have long been debated. Within the field of anthropology there is debate about whether ritual is part of celebration or vice versa. In my view, they are not mutually exclusive. Drawing on the work of sociologist George Simmel, John MacAloon (1982) writes about how celebration contains both episodes of play and solemnity. Victor Turner viewed celebration as a mixture of art and ritual (1982a). Turner too, highlighted that celebration is derived

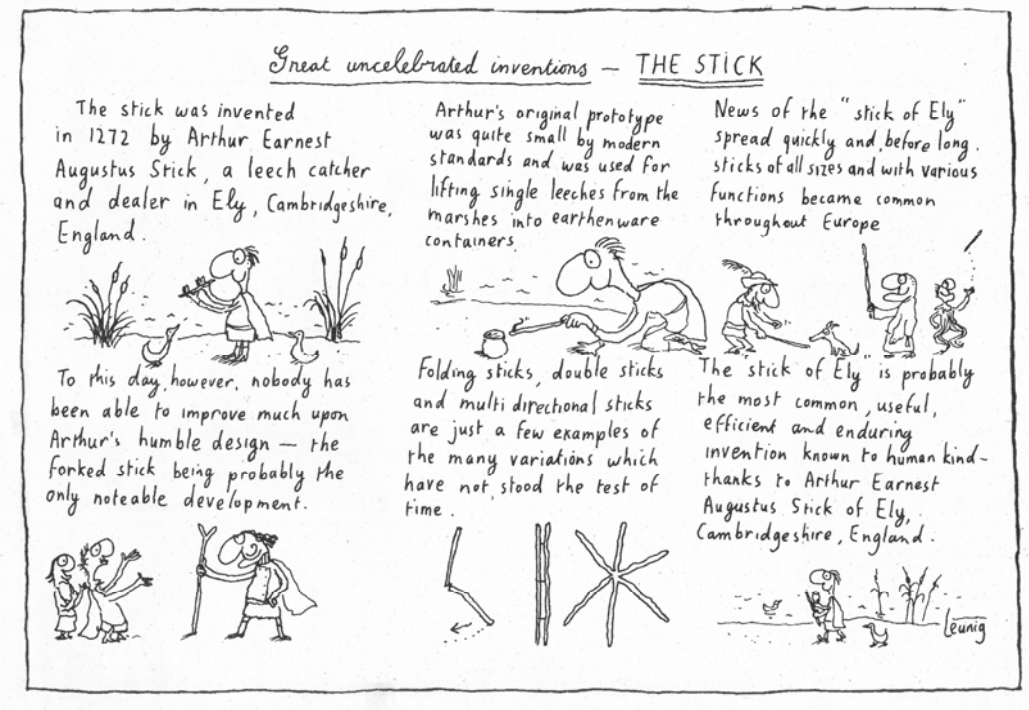
from Latin *celeber*, "numerous, much frequented," and relates to vivacity or "effervescence" (1982a, p. 16).

When defining ritual there are often two main approaches. The first regards ritual as simply a repeated behaviour. The second definition regards ritual as a much more conscious or formal activity that involves pre-planned 'scripts' such as that occurs in ceremonies. The symbolic nature of rituals has been noted by many including Turner (1982a), Myerhoff and Arbor (1992) and Imber-Black and Roberts (1992).

Ritual can be something we do out of mindless habit or it can be something that holds our deep attention and provides an opportunity to reflect on ourselves and our communities. Joseph Campbell noted for his work on myth viewed ritual as simply that which focuses our attention on the implications of what we are doing (1991b, p. 90). Focusing our attention implies focusing our intention. These aspects of attention and intention have been captured by theologian John O'Donahue who believes, "celebration is an attentive and gracious joy of presence" (1998, p. 106).

The ability to view the ordinary as extraordinary is a common theme of celebrations. This can involve recognising that each individual and place is unique and special. As Indian scholar M.N. Srinivas once said, "We see it with new eyes. The commonplace has become marvellous" (in Cameron, p. 95). As such celebrations are an affirmation.

And finally, Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff in drawing on the work of S.F. Nadel asserted "…any aspect of social life, any aspect of behaviour or ideology, may lend itself to ritualisation" (1977, p. 8). I would argue the same applies to celebration. Anything can be celebrated, a person, place, the individual, the collective, ideas, any aspect of life. Michael Leunig frequently reminds of this. Below he celebrates an everyday item - the stick.



(Leunig 2002, no page listed)

Celebrations are often repeated. When they are, traditions can develop and expectations can be created about the way a particular celebration will look and feel.

The similarities between play and ritual have long been noted (Huizinga, 1948). Both Johan Huizinga (1948) and Roger Caillois (2001) view play as free activity separate from everyday life. Schechner (2002) who is interested in celebration as performance discusses how play can be both exploratory or rule bound. Schechner (2002, p. 82) regards exploration, learning, creativity, risk and flow experiences as key elements of play. Play can be purposeful, and have qualities of permission giving, possibility and imagination. A distinction can be made between fixed ritual and play that privileges methods which reaffirm existing positions and those that adopt a more open process allowing for individual input and control. Different forms of celebrations whether they be festivals, birthdays, weddings or office parties will be comprised of various degrees of play and/or ritual, of fluidity and fixidity, formality and informality. I agree with Schechner (2002) who asserts that in contemporary times there has been an increase in 'superficial' play components including performance, entertainment and recreation and less engagement with formal ritual. A further distinction is often made between secular celebrations and those that seek to foster a sense of sacredness.

What is play, ritual and hence celebration is culturally determined. What is play within one culture or context may be ritual within another. Culture is defined not only by ethnic identity but also by family, professional, organisational and community identities and experiences.

4.2 A working definition of celebration for this thesis

Given the above, I consider celebrations to be an active process made up of both play and ritual elements including the creative and artistic. Celebrations seek to focus people's attention, and intention, in a positive way. The resulting celebratory act(s) or products create a time and place for the cultural expression of what a particular individual or community positively values. There are a diversity of celebration forms and practices - open, closed, spontaneous, planned and, formal. Celebrations are influenced by, and influences, the context in which they occur. While it can be how we view each moment each day, I will be focusing on collective celebrations that involve communities. A community may be a family, an organisation, local community, shared interest group or a whole of society grouping.

It is this element of consciously gathering together with an intention of positively valuing someone or something and drawing on ritual and play, that distinguishes a celebration from other forms of social engagement.

While I use the term celebration I will also refer to particular celebration elements such as ritual and ceremony and refer to particular types of celebratory forms discussed below.

4.3 Celebratory forms

Celebrations can take on a variety of forms which will depend on:

- **why** or the purpose of the celebration.
- **what** is being celebrated. For example, life cycle events such as birth, puberty and death or naming, marriage, civic or religious holidays; recognition and achievements; changes including beginnings and endings; memorial; milestones; 'our' community.
- **when** they are conducted. For example, are they cyclical or spontaneous.
- **who** is included and excluded.
- **where** they are held (for example, public or private).
- **how** they are constructed (for example, formal, informal, spontaneous, civic, religious).
- **elements** included (for example, ceremony, dance, music, singing, feasting, storymaking and telling, symbolism etc).
- **size** (for example, small and intimate, medium and large scale 'hallmark' events).

Celebrations can be seen as a space and a process where the factors above combine, sometimes in complementary and contradictory ways. Celebrations come in a kaleidoscope of colours, shapes and sizes.

There are multiple celebratory forms including public events such as holidays, festivals, carnivals, concerts, fairs, funerals, religious days, sporting events, graduation and civic commemorations. More personal forms include birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, house-warmings, informal gatherings with friends or interest groups and so forth. While there are commonalities between each form and within each form over time, each individual celebration can be viewed as a unique cultural expression or montage of a particular group at a particular time.

Many contemporary celebrations replicate or draw on traditional celebratory forms. Within Australia this includes both the Aboriginal heritage and the cultural heritage of migrants. New and emerging forms have emerged in response to other celebrations.

For example, *Invasion or Survival Day* arose in response to the 1988 *Australian Centenary* celebrations; non-religious naming ceremonies are being held in response to a decline in religious affiliations. Such trends are explored further in the next chapter.

The most commonly defined type of public community celebration are festivals which Janiskee views as,

> formal periods or programs of pleasurable activities, entertainment, or events having a festive character and publicly celebrating some concept, happening or fact (in De Bres and Davis 2001, p. 329).

The United Kingdom Policy Studies Institute asserts that:

> A festival was traditionally a time of celebration, relaxation and recuperation which often followed a period of hard physical labour, sowing or harvesting of crops, for example. The essential feature of these festivals was the celebration or reaffirmation of community or culture. The artistic content of such events was variable and many had a religious or ritualistic aspect, but music, dance and drama were important features of the celebration (in Bowdin and Williams 2005, p. 466).

Bowdin and Williams discuss the research done by the British Arts Festivals Association which

> suggests that arts festivals can be grouped into several categories, including high profile general celebrations of the arts, festivals that celebrated a particular location, art form festivals, celebration of work by a community of interest, calendar including cultural or religious festivals, amateur festivals and commercial music festivals (2005, p. 466).

The community celebrations I examined included a range of 'defining' activities. These included creation of arts products by artists, performances, art and craft activities, music, dance, food, commercial stalls, markets, fireworks, parades, fundraising, displays, show and tell activities, demonstrations, show bags, speakers, competitions, talent quests, environmental activities, bon fires, and publications. One or more of the following themes would be evident:

- **Enjoymen**t, fun and relief from 'everyday' life
- **Bringing people together** and creating 'a sense of community'
- **Building community**
- **Showcasing** people, the arts, cultural traditions, community assets
- **Education**, be it awareness raising around health or environmental issues, providing opportunities for skill development or personal transformation
- **Creative** expression
- **Social healing** (for example, Aboriginal reconciliation)
- **Valuing diversity** by providing exposure to a range of ethnic cultures and challenging racist values
- **Social action**, in particular advocacy for the most disadvantaged within the community
- The **interconnection** between self, community, spirit and the earth

These themes were not mutually exclusive and most of the celebrations either intentionally or unintentionally, were multi-themed. For example as the original festival co-ordinator of the *CERES Autumn Harvest Festival*[3] stated.

> *It turns eating into a cross between theatre, ritual, and sacrament - and also a political statement, through its emphasis on cultural diversity, organics, time-consuming and hand prepared food.*

Further, these themes suggest the multidimensional nature of celebrations at both the personal and collective level. For example, we know that fostering creativity, social connectedness and learning has a positive impact on the mental health of individuals as well as creating a more vibrant cultural context (VicHealth, 2003a). While valuing diversity and fostering social action can support emancipation both within individuals as well as for broader community groupings (VicHealth, 2005a).

The next chapter will discuss the contexts and trends impacting on celebrations forms and practices in Australia.

[3] Just a reminder that the festival projects I studied in Victoria have short descriptions in appendix one.

Chapter 5: Celebrations and Contesting Interests in the Australian Context

> …every religion or belief system, every tribe, every city has its own versions and variations [of celebrating]: it is common to all peoples (Cameron 2004, p. 10).

Given the diversity that exists within the Australian population it is not surprising that there is no one celebration that universally all Australian citizens would identify with. Each individual, family and community group have developed their own rhythms and forms of celebration which continue to change over time. These may be within formal religious institutions or be spontaneous responses to life circumstances such as when the town of Beaconsfield, Tasmania 'celebrated' the freedom of two miners trapped underground for fourteen days in May, 2006.

5.1 People, culture and change

This thesis examines contemporary Australian celebrations during the late 20th and early 21st century. In doing so I acknowledge that the content and form of Australian celebrations reflect both the landscape and a variety of traditional and contemporary cultural interests including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, British colonialists and other migrants from across the world. Celebrations are also influenced by sporting, artistic, religious, political and economic interests and those of family and friends.

5.1.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities living in Australia particularly prior to colonisation corroborees and ceremony were interwoven into the social and spiritual fabric of their lives. These were integral to the cosmology that connected people with the land. While such gatherings are still an important part of contemporary experiences, many Aboriginal communities have had to redefine their cultural lives and heritage since colonisation and genocide and within the context of a

non-Aboriginal dominant culture. In the last twenty years there have been gains in reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, and as a result Aboriginal interests, in particular prior ownership of the land, are acknowledged more frequently in celebrations held in the public domain.

5.1.2 Multi-cultural influences

The migration program of Australia has led it to become one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. The majority of Australian celebrations are inherited from those who have migrated here. The appropriateness of many of these celebrations within the Australian context have been questioned by commentators including Cameron (1995, 2004) and Livingstone (2002) who believe they are inappropriate in the southern hemisphere as they have not evolved out of our local geography. This leads to the adoption of symbols and images that are not reflective of the Australian landscape such as for example, mid-winter images of snow men and reindeer adorning window displays and greeting cards during the Australian summer period as part of Christmas celebrations.

There are those who have 'Australianised' many of the 'imported' traditions. One example is the *Bachelor and Spinster Ball* held in rural regions. Derived from formal debutant balls held in Europe, young people dress up in 'fancy' gear (often from the local second hand shop) and hang out in a farm paddock drinking, socialising and watching utes (utility vans) do circle work.

Since the 1970's agencies have funded and supported 'ethnic or multicultural' celebrations to 'showcase' and educate the community about the traditions of 'new' migrant communities. These are part of a broader 'multicultural' strategy adopted by all levels of government and will be discussed in later chapters.

5.1.3 Agricultural influences

The 1940's and 1950's saw the introduction of city and town festivals (McDonnell, Allen and O'Toole, 1999). Many of these community festivals still continue today.

The Royal Agricultural show which is a mixture of show rides, exhibitions and stalls and agricultural products is the classic model for this type of event.

5.1.4 The Arts

Capital cities have also developed arts festivals both in response to isolation such as the *Perth* and *Adelaide Art Festivals,* and to promote commercial interests such as the *Sydney Festival*. These festivals are predominantly vehicles for professional artists and musicians within the classical arts. 'Fringe' festivals have been added in recent years which allow for more local and emerging talents to be show cased. Arts festivals are now actively supported by a number of government bodies including the Australia Council for the Arts and Regional Arts Australia.

5.1.5 Sport - A national passion

One of the most common interests Australians come together for is sport. Nearly half (48%) of the Australian population aged 18 years and over attended at least one sporting event in 2002. The main sport attended was Australian Rules football (17.1%) (ABS, 2003). The *Melbourne Cup* is an annual horse race and is reported to 'stop a nation' while the *Sydney Olympic Games* in 2000 sold 92.7% of the 5.7 million tickets allocated. Over 47,000 volunteers supported Sydney Olympic events and there were 362,000 domestic and overseas visitors. In Australia, 10 million people watched the opening and closing ceremonies (ABS, 2002b).

5.1.6 Religion, spirituality and secularisation

Those belonging to religious communities celebrate a variety of traditions and celebrations during the year. Christians make up the largest religious group in Australia comprising 68% of the population in 2001 of whom 26% are Catholic and 20% are Anglican (Bouma, 2002). Not surprisingly the religious based public holidays of Christmas and Easter have Christian origins. However there are many other religious communities. Each religious group has its own celebratory practices.

Traditionally, for many communities religion provided ritual and ceremonial guidance. However, Hugh Mackay (2002) has noted there is decreasing trust in, or identification with, religious institutions. Many people I spoke with said they did not find the traditional rites and celebrations meaningful. For example, several spoke about how for them, Christmas was not about religious beliefs and practices, but about family coming together. Some institutions such as the Anglican church have sought to develop more inclusive ritual practices. Others such as the Pentacostal churches actively use contemporary art forms such as rock concerts to connect with young people (for example, go to www.hillsong.com).

Recent analysis by Gary Bouma (2002) of Australian census data shows that religious diversity is increasing and despite the general trend towards secularisation the numbers of people practicing non-Christian religions such as Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism, Gaia, Goddess religions and Wicca are growing. There too is a strong movement towards personally defined spirituality. As Tacey states,

> spirituality has become diverse, plural, manifold, and seems to have countless forms of expression, many of which are highly individualistic and personal. Spirituality is now for everyone, and almost everyone seems to be involved, but in radically different ways (2003a, p. 38).

Each year there is a great deal of social commentary in the media about what Christmas means and how it is being celebrated. There is special attention on how it has become a commercial affair. Several people I spoke with said they dread Christmas with all the consumer stress and family expectations that it involves. This is not surprising given the Australian Retailers Association estimated $30.73 billion would be spent over the 2005 Christmas period (Cullen, 2005).

There has also been much discussion in the media around the cultural appropriateness of particular community celebrations such as Christmas. Is it appropriate to celebrate Christmas given the diversity of beliefs that exist within the community? This has led to the removal of Christmas decorations from public settings, in part so as not to offend non-Christians. Some schools have chosen to no longer sing Christmas Carols. My observation as a Diversity Health Co-ordinator where similar issues were raised in

a hospital context is that people do not feel offended by other traditions being expressed but rather are distressed when they are denied the opportunity to practice beliefs and practices important to them. During this research I met non-Christians who still had family gatherings and brought presents at Christmas. There is a need for mutual respect for beliefs. I would argue that we do not need to take away a particular celebration but rather add others to the existing mix. That is, to publicly acknowledge the range of celebrations that occur during the course of the year. The most appropriate way of finding out what is important is by asking people. But there is general information about cultural celebrations available, such as the multicultural events calendar produced each year by the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (see www.fecca.org.au/calendar). The issues raised here will be discussed further in chapter 11.

5.1.7 Public holidays

Australia has several non-religious based public holidays such as *New Year's Day* and *Australia Day*, originally viewed as *Foundation Day* and marked the formal possession of the colony of NSW, the *Queens Birthday* as Australia is still part of the Commonwealth, *Labour Day* which celebrates the introduction of the eight hour work day as a result of union action, and *ANZAC Day* which commemorates the sacrifices made by Australians and New Zealanders in war.

The public celebration that has the greatest potential to unite Australians is *Australia Day*. Each year it generates discussion within the media about: 'What is it to be Australian?' The nature of Australian identity has changed a great deal over the past 200 years. Writing in *The Australian* newspaper, Stuart Rintoul (2004) captures the changing nature of Australia Day.

> Historian Manning Clark noted that in 1808 the 'anniversary of the foundation of the colony' was observed in a traditional manner with 'drinking and merriment'. During the 19th century as Foundation day, the anniversary was usually marked by sporting events. Fifty years after Phillip landed, Australia's first public holiday was announced to celebrate Foundation Day 1838. Unlike previous celebrations, it was a 'day for everyone', with Sydney harbour foreshores crowded, and a cracker display. The 1888 centenary, as Australia Day, was marked by ceremonies, parades, exhibitions, fireworks, banquets, church services and regattas. Loyal to mother England despite talk of federation, an

estimated 50,000 people watched governor Carrington unveil a statue in honour of Queen Victoria.

Fifty years later the showpiece of the NSW celebrations was a re-enactment of Phillip's landing, complete with a party of Aborigines who had been brought to Sydney when their city counterparts refused to participate. Several hours before the re-enactment, Aboriginal activities convened a Day of Mourning conference aimed at securing citizenship and equal status for Aborigines. At a time when those with convict origins were inclined to silence, the celebrations omitted any mention of Australia's convict roots.

The Commonwealth created Australia Day council in 1946 to raise public awareness of the day, which was subsequently linked to the Australian of the Year award, inaugurated in 1960, and the announcement of Australian honours. But through all these years and guises, Australia Day was greeted with determined ambivalence.

Historian Geoffrey Blainey says Australia Day took on a new meaning after the 1988 Bicentennial celebrations, when tall ships sailed through Sydney's heads and city streets were jammed with 'quietly proud people'. Culminating in an extravagant display of fireworks, the bicentennial celebrations also reignited the anger of Aborigines, who rallied behind slogans such as 'White Australia has a black history' and '40,000 years doesn't make a bicentennial'. Paul Kelly sang that he could not bring himself to dance on Aboriginal graves.

This year, Australia Day was said to be a celebration of the people - from the battlers to the eminent - the land, our diversity, freedom, democracy and a fair go for all, defining in part as 'enduring sprit of mateship and fairness'

It was said to represent 'Indigenous cultures', a view reflected in Aboriginal dancing and by indigenous senator Aden Ridgway who told an Invasion Day rally in Sydney's Redfern "Whether you know it as Australia Day or Invasion Day, it is a day when we can reflect on the two perspectives of the same history".

The official Australia Day website states it is about "celebrating what is great about Australia, what we have achieved, what we are proud of and recommitting to making Australia a better place" (www.australiaday.gov.au as at January, 2006). For some, Australia Day is imbued with meaning. And particularly so for the many migrants, some 13,000 in 2005, who are welcomed through citizenship ceremonies across Australia (Huxley and Ireland, 2005). For others Australia Day is simply a day off

from work and time to gather with family and friends. As Tony Stephens wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

> Much of the pleasure of Australia Day 2004 was found on and around Sydney Harbour, at backyard barbecues across the nation, at noisy cricket games on the beach and in the bush, during languid conversations by pools and in parks…(2004).

In 2006 my brother had a Triple J Hottest 100 Australia Day party, which he does each year. He and his friends sit around listening to the most popular songs voted by listeners of this radio station.

5.2 Celebrations as protest

Celebrations play an important role in fostering dialogue. This can include indirect protest. This occurs in personal contexts such as amongst families and friends planning weddings and with communities planning a local festival. And there are celebrations that, at least in part, have their origins in direct protest and actively seek to generate robust dialogue. For example, the arts community in Wauchope, a rural town in New South Wales, created an arts festival to highlight the contribution this group made to the broader community and to protest at the demolition of the local hall which was a venue for their activities. The *Sydney Mardi Gras* is a more well known example. The origins of the *Sydney Mardi Gras* started as a street rally in protest at the lack of rights experienced by people in same-sex partnerships. It created a profile for this community and fostered dialogue within this group about 'their' identity, and about their rights within the wider community. Subsequently, it has played an important role in changing community attitudes. However, like other similar Mardi Gras around the world, as community attitudes and acceptance shifted, it too has changed over time. In the 1980s organisers deliberately chose to focus more on celebrating what it is to be gay and lesbian. The street parade was integrated into a broader arts festival involving a series of events. The *Sydney Mardi Gras* has grown significantly bigger with crowds up to half a million people. It has become a large commercial event. It is estimated that the net economic impact on the Australian economy from 2005 Mardi Gras specific expenditure was around $36 million and

around $46 million dollars on the New South Wales economy (Marsh and Wilson, 2005). These changes, particularly what some saw as a focus on 'party' and not 'protest' along with the commercialisation of Mardi Gras generated much criticism that 'it was selling out'. Comments by Ignatious Jones in Richard Wherrett's 1999 collection of *Mardi Gras: True Stories* (in Dick, 2005) are typical of this view.

> I don't know why anyone watches the parade now…With a few sparse exceptions, its become a cavalcade of tacky placards and poofs and dykes dancing on the back of trucks. Mardi Gras seems to be slipping into an ugly abyss between amateur and awful, between the tackiest aspects of community involvement and commercialism.

Mardi Gras continues to generate a great deal of dialogue within and across community groups (go to www.pinkboard.com.au). In 2002 its 24th year, the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras suffered financial collapse. Dialogue since then has focused on the degree to which it is still relevant and for whom. There has been much discussion about how it has lost its connection with 'its' community. Some suggested its traditional focus on images of 'camp' gay men and 'butch' dykes was not inclusive enough in contemporary times, particularly for young people. Where were the voices of bisexuals, transgender and same sex couples with their families? The increasing professionalisation of *Sydney Mardi Gras* was also seen as contributing to this distancing from community. Co-chairwoman of the *New Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*, Stevie Clayton acknowledged, "When you don't have the heart of the community connected…then it is an organisation that can go easily off the rails" (Hornery, 2002). Subsequent discussions led to the *Sydney Mardi Gras* redefining itself. It has been resurrected again on a smaller scale with the support of substantial volunteer, rather than professional, input. It too has actively taken a broader, more inclusive, approach. As Helen Razor reports, "New Mardi Gras no longer requires potential members to disclose their sexual proclivities; instead it asks newcomers to affirm their commitment to 'sustaining and strengthening' the queer community" (2004). Robert Reynolds sums up the differing viewpoints well.

> People in our own communities will express wildly diverse feelings about Mardi Gras. Some will reify it like a Holy Grail of ultimate queerdom. Others will write it off as extravagant, tokenistic, irrelevant and even counter-productive. I've often heard the old argument that the parade just reinforces the stereotype of queers as frivolous, hedonistic,

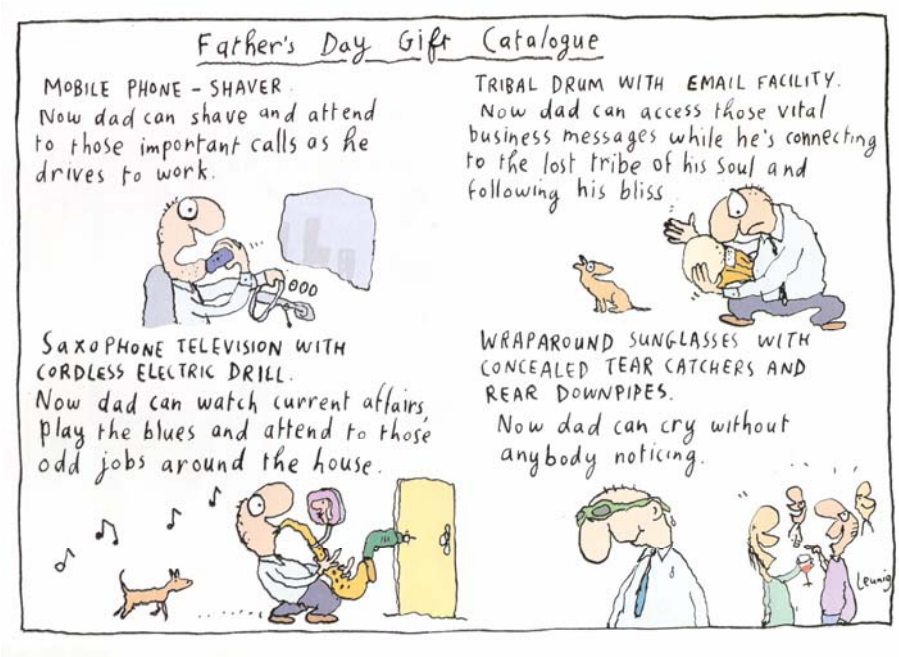
> sex-crazed freaks (and is this a bad thing?) Perhaps they are missing he point that Mardi Gras is a celebration of diversity, an opportunity to openly include the expressions of all, even those we may not personally approve of (2005, p. 18).

The protest and educational dimensions of celebrations will be explored again further in subsequent chapters.

5.3 Contemporary influences

Celebrations are spaces where political, social, and cultural interactions occur. They can be seen as a microcosm of society and emerge from, and influence, the broader contexts in which they are located. The following seeks to outline a number of dominant and counter trends that are currently influencing the celebration landscape.

5.3.1 Socio-economic and political trends



(Leunig 2004, no page listed)

Michael Leunig's cartoon shows the contemporary lived experience. It is a satirical depiction of neo-liberalism. This doctrine which holds so much sway in Australia propagates a belief in the virtue of free markets and is sceptical of public sector

interventions. Knowledge gained through empirical or 'scientific' research is privileged. Neo-liberal policies have led state and federal governments in Australia to reduce welfare support and to pursue policies of privatisation of previously public services and assets. In comparison to other economically 'developed' countries, Australians now work the longest hours and have less holiday leave than most (The Australia Institute, 2005).

Furthermore, the divide between the rich and poor is growing (Wicks, 2005) and the belief that individuals have to guide their own destiny has led to decline of collectivist values such as solidarity, sharing, co-operation and social justice (James and Prilleltensky, 2002). The focus is on individual responsibility to the exclusion of the broader social determinants of health.

Other social trends include feminism which has led to changes in gender roles and opportunities for some women. Demographic changes have resulted from increased mobility and an aging population. There is increased urbanisation with culturally diverse populations. People are more likely to live alone, be more socially isolated or live in constantly changing but more personalised, nuclear contexts.

This has led to social networks being increasingly based on shared work, interests or beliefs. Family groups are increasingly self defined. This, social researcher Hugh Mackay (2002) believes, is resulting in more local, immediate, personal agendas. This view is also shared by Edward O'Sullivan, "more and more, the intimate family has become almost the primary source of intimacy and affection" (1999, p. 123).

Amitai Etzioni (2000) argues there is a decline in the bonding that ties small social entities into a society and in the level of the individual commitments to society. This reflects a growing loyalty to particularistic groups (ethnic, religious etc). Jeremy Boissevain (1991) observed that the frequency of exclusive community defined celebrations in Europe is growing.

In Australia, Hugh Mackay (2001a) discusses the tribal nature of young people and suggests that, in the face of all this individualism, particularism and commercialism they are now seeking ways to connect. *Schoolies* week which will be discussed later

is one example that does this. Music festivals are another form that draws young people together. 270,000 people attended the *Big Day Out* in 2004 (Scatena, 2005). The founder, Ken West explains, "I got the idea of what festivals were about when they were described as tribal gatherings, the new church, a kind of community coming together" (Baird, 2004). These become important annual pilgrimages for people such as my brother now in his early 30s, and his old school friends.

That people are craving for social connection is noted by Simon Castles who argues that "modern day mourning rituals over celebrities are less to do with truly grieving the dead and more to do with grabbing an opportunity to connect with others, and temper our isolation and loneliness" (2005).

5.3.2 Commercial influences

> Our public festivals and celebrations, our parades and our private rituals are being strangled by commercialism, mediocrity and habit (Cameron 1993, p. 180-181). …many festivals we experience in modern society have lost their inner meaning. …So often the same things are repeated year after year until they become stale and tired and a sense of real joy is often generated artificially by drink (Cameron 1993, p. 152).

In their research examining key trends and issues in research about event management Hede, Jago and Deery (2002) discuss how celebrations are valued in terms of their economic rather than social value. Companies and event managers are continually seeking new market opportunities. This has led to celebrations becoming commercial products for sale and purchase within the market place. If fact, they are big business. As I have already mentioned, there is a continuing commercialisation of holidays such as Christmas as well as Easter and, other large and small public events including the *Olympic Games* as well as local festivals, organisational parties and personal celebrations such as birthdays and weddings (for a discussion of consumerism, romance and the wedding experience see Boden, 2003). The average wedding is reported to cost on average $33,831 (Australian Bridal Industry, 2006). The industry in total is worth more than three and a half billion dollars (Australian Bridal Industry, 2006). Increasingly celebration type activities are being used to generate funding. For example, community organisations such as Rotary and Lions groups often use

local fairs and festivals to fundraise, the Cancer Council's *Daffodil Day* for Cancer and their *Girls Night In* for Breast Cancer encourages groups of women to gather and share food, watch a movie, pamper themselves, hold a fashion parade and to donate what they would usually spend on a night out.

The increasing use of community festivals as tourism activities for promoting local and regional economic development is noted within the event management sector (Wood, 2002; while the 2002 Australian Centre for Event Management conference theme was *Events and Placemaking*). One friend observed

> *…lately community boosters in our town have generated so many festivals, new and old, that it's become a bit of a local joke.*

Corporate branding and sponsorship of events including community celebrations is now common place. John Aitken, a local event manager has described these recent trends well.

> Over the last few decades, 'Eventing' and the terminology that has been applied to events and celebrations has become a little less poetic and spiritual in nature, and a whole lot more economic and strategic. Since the 1980's the trend has been for governments to embrace events for their potential to drive big business, vehicles upon which both desired realities and perceptions of the government of the day can be driven. Economic resurgence, an economic driver via tourism; community and cultural development; the building, strengthening and maintaining of a destination's unique brand; the incentive to undertake enormous urban renewal and or event infrastructure developments (2002, p. 5).

Cameron is quite critical of the events industry which he believes is "…often involved in manufacturing 'products' providing 'fun' experiences that are apparently good value for money" (2004, p. 133) which result in a superficial, passive and consumeristic, 'party culture'. This is not surprising particularly where local government authorities or organisations contract out their events to commercial operators. Increasingly events are being given the title festival but are not much more than a collection of market stalls promoting products. This is consistent with research conducted by Boissevain (1991) who has observed a decrease in ritual elements in community festivals in Europe and an increasing emphasis on the aesthetic and

theatrical elements of celebrations such as theatre, costumes, band marches and wild spontaneous demonstrations. This can also be reflected in such trends as theme parties for children (Demasi, 2005).

This is not to ignore that positive experiences can be had but I believe they have less capacity than celebrations that focus on community health and wellbeing to foster positive transformational change at both the individual and community level.

A former director of the Big West Festival in Melbourne expressed concern during his interview about the increasing number of festivals occurring and how he felt festivals were being *"run into the ground. Expectations are low, usually there is a lot of fried food, lots of noise and carnival rides."* Few festivals were perceived to have the health and wellbeing of communities as a primary interest.

The trend towards entertainment and leisure activities was reflected in many of the festivals I attended. Most of the celebrations I studied in Victoria provided only passive experiences for those attending. That is, people were more likely to be part of an audience than a participant. Only a few community celebrations provided opportunities for more active and participatory cross-community exchanges and even fewer created spaces where the 'whole-of-community' could come together to engage in the same activity at the same time.

Schoolies week provides one example of how commercial interests are impacting on the celebration landscape. It commenced as a small gathering of young people in a coastal town to celebrate the end of Year 12. Over the following decade the numbers grew and an enterprising group trademarked the name *Schoolies*. In 1999 *Schoolies* in Surfers Paradise attracted 700,000 people (it had been 2,000 at the end of the 1980s) and brought in $60 million to the local economy. Breakfree one of the major business operators has since been listed on the stock exchange. Schoolies is now a tightly choreographed event, sponsored by big companies with ever increasing amounts of merchandise and commercial activities (including a Schoolies ocean cruise). As Justin Norrie reported (2004a), "few of the school leavers appreciate that their end-of-year extravaganza is owned, orchestrated and exploited by wealthy adults." It is an event that is increasingly only accessible to the wealthy. Norrie

(2004b) reported that two out three school leavers booking with Breakfree were from private schools.

Regional festivals have also been feeling the pressure to focus on commercial outcomes and to get 'bigger and better' each year. This has placed social and mental pressure on small communities and led several festivals to cease. As Gordy Blair (2003) who traced the history of the *Mallacoota Easter Festival*[4] wrote:

> Greater and greater effort was being expended on the acquisition of sponsorship, to grow the festival and improve production values and enable increased payment for workers. But the money makes it more competitive…drawing on the same pool of volunteers who are now middle aged. The feeling that the festival was getting too big was fairly widespread among the organisers as it was among the community. They started to tire of this thing.

5.3.3 Professionalisation

Before the industrial era the responsibility of community celebrations was often the domain of shamans and priests/priestesses who were often both healers and/or religious leaders who drew on the creative and spiritual arts.

> It not only integrated storytelling, dance and performance, but it also provided the matrix out of which other cultural activities such as art, medicine, and education gradually emerged, differentiating themselves from one another (Grimes in discussing shamanism 2000, p. 13).

Shamans actively seek to foster wholeness - whole earth, community and individual. "By doing Earth-healing rites and ceremonies you are establishing a conscious, awakened, sacred relationship with the Earth" (Miro-Quesada 2004, p. 12). They utilise creative forms such as celebrations as ways of achieving this. Shamanic healing can be viewed as the initial integral health approach as it linked community with individual and supported internal integration of mind, body and soul, and external behaviour (Krippner, 2004). Traditional shamanic practices are now utilised by Western therapeutic modalities such as psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, movement, art and narrative therapy.

[4] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

Within the contemporary Australian context priests are still involved in personalised and private celebrations of a religious nature. However, since 1974, celebrants have taken on a much more active role. To date, they have primarily focused on civic weddings, funerals and naming ceremonies. Event managers tend to be employed on medium to large public festivals, sporting and corporate events. Local festivals depending on their size, draw on a mix of volunteers, artists and paid event managers. All these groups have become increasingly 'professionalised'. While there is potential overlap, each particular group of practitioners has a distinct primary focus and is informed by differing ideological frameworks which I describe and discuss below.

Type of Practitioner	**Context**	**Theoretical and policy influences**	**Societal influences**	**Types of Celebration**
Celebrants	Personal (families, friends)	Humanistic Government policy Legislation	Secularisation Individualism	Weddings Namings Personal Transitions
Population health and community development Workers	Local communities (eg geographical)	Emancipatory practices Population health discourses	Social isolation Mental health problems	Local community festivals (geographical)
Health therapists (1-1)	Individual or family	Therapeutic Developmental	Wholistic health	Rites of passage Healing
Event managers	Organisations Regional Communities	Neoliberalism	Legal and risk management Economic opportunities	Local & regional festivals Corporate events Large scale events
Priests and spiritual leaders	Congregation	Theological	Spirituality movement Fundamentalism	Weddings Religious rituals Religious festivals
Artists	Self expression	Hermeneutic	Creativity Economic opportunities	Arts festivals
Urban shamans/ Ritual leaders	Personal development	Indigenous wisdom	First Nation cultural knowledge New Age Cosmologies	Personal and community rituals and gatherings

Table 1: Examination of major influences and trends impacting upon professional celebration practitioners

Table one describes the major groups of professional practitioners who create and manage celebrations in Australia, the typical contexts in which they operate, key theoretical and social influences and most common types of celebrations they are associated with.

Event managers are typically intent on creating new event opportunities, developing 'professional' looking events, managing the legal and regulatory requirements and ensuring the mandate of their employer is met which is usually economic viability and tourism. Artists are sought for creative input. Cameron (2004) notes that artists have played an expanded role in the community festivals sector since the 1970s. With some taking on event management responsibilities. Artists generally adopt one of two approaches. Some use festivals as a vehicle to present the work of professional artists. Others, drawing on traditions of community cultural development, are more intent on supporting individuals and the community to explore issues and express themselves through creative processes.

Most of these professional practice groups have developed their own courses and training opportunities which reflect their differing philosophies. For example, the core modules in a postgraduate event management course at the University of Technology, Sydney focus on business aspects such as event creation, event management, operational management, event marketing, law, accounting and research.

A review I conducted in 2004 of courses that could be relevant to celebration organisers identified most were event management courses located within business and tourism university departments such as the Australian Centre for Event Management at the University of Technology, Sydney. A small number of arts faculties provided associated courses such as arts management at the University of Melbourne and, event and production management at the Victorian College of Arts. A Bachelor of Arts with a focus on community development is offered at the Victorian University.

Celebrants are required to complete competency based training (plus five hours of professional development each year) (Australian Attorney-General's Department). Training for priests and other religious leaders is often within the context of their

religious organisation although there are a number of university level theological courses. There are a small number of courses for people interested in shamanic practices offered by registered training authorities. Shamanic training courses are now appearing within complementary health curricula. But a lot of people learn by participating in festivals and gatherings.

In response to the recognition of the health and wellbeing aspects of community celebrations it is possible that with time community and health workers will take a greater 'professional' interest in celebrations. Already there are those with a therapeutic health background who often utilise personalised rituals to foster healing and personal growth for individuals (Roche, 1994; Rogers and Holloway, 1991). For example, I spoke with health professionals who used celebration and ritual within their drug rehabilitation programs. One spoke about how participants are supported to create their own ritual about their intention to move into a period of life free from drug dependency.

Other professional development support is provided by professional associations, the government sector such as TAFE and private training companies, most of whom offer competency based courses. Several practitioners with community arts backgrounds spoke about the lack of professional development opportunities and mentioned they had created their own peer support networks to address the sense of professional isolation they often experienced.

Professionalisation raises the question about the nature and level of competency that would be desirable for planning and facilitating celebrations. Analysis of my interviews would suggest that because of the specialised nature of the training provided by each professional group few have skill sets across all the areas required to produce celebrations that foster health and wellbeing. For example, event managers' strengths lie with the business and logistical aspects of planning and managing celebrations. Health and community workers' strengths are in bringing people together to work collaboratively on activities. Priests are trained in ritual and ceremony. Correspondingly artists skills lie in the creative arts. Subsequently, celebrations require a team or multidisciplinary approach. This is not always possible with small scale celebrations. I spoke with several people whose primary

skills were in one area such as the arts and had taken on roles that required them to develop other skills such as dealing with funding applications and logistical skills. The consequence of not receiving training in these areas results in lack of awareness of how these various elements contribute to celebrations. And the dominance of the 'professionally trained' event manager has led to the marginalisation of the creative and community development aspects of community celebrations.

There appears to be little critical reflection occurring within these professional groups of strengths and limitations of their professional training. Cameron discusses this in relation to artists.

> Whereas in traditional cultures as well as in the Christian churches and other religions, the shamans, priests and other officials are carefully trained in management of ritual and ceremony by more experienced practitioners, often artists in contemporary secular contexts are invited to play pivotal roles in such events when their training has been in arts practice or arts management, not processes of ritual (2004, p. 13).

He goes onto argue there is a need for a new kind of artist who can "understand, stimulate, articulate, design and help to perform ritual and celebration in a way that is meaningful in any level or in any part of society" (2004, p. 137).

The impact of poor skill sets was reflected in the documentary *Taking Charge of Cabramatta* (1999, Dai Le). This documentary showed how one of the council workers, an event manager, and the Mayor decided a flower festival was the answer to changing the negative image people had of the 'City of Cabramatta'. It was seen as a way for local groups to work together and would draw in people from outside the local community. They hoped it would re-position Cabramatta as a place not just about crime but about festivities. It was decided to celebrate the *Lunar New Year Vietnamese Flower Festival Day*. The event manager focused on the logistical aspects of the event which in the end consisted of market stalls of flowers which were brought in by commercial florists from outside the region. No consultation occurred with the local florists who became very upset and successfully lobbied for the festival to be closed.

5.3.4 Legalisation and regulation

(Leunig 2006, no page number listed)

Ulrich Beck discusses the concept and implications of risk as manufactured by experts and industries world-wide. "Risks have become a major force of political mobilisation, often replacing references to, for example, inequalities associated with class, race and gender" (1999, p. 4). Beck describes how in contemporary times a legal framework rather than social norms provide safety and security for people. This is illustrated by the impact of high cost public liability insurance. In Australia, in the last ten years higher insurance and operating costs have directly led to public celebrations ceasing or alternatively organisers of small community celebrations partnering with larger organisations such as local government authorities to cover this requirement. This has subsequently increased the power these larger organisations have in controlling celebration formats and processes. Not all government agencies are supportive of community activities. Several organisers I spoke with were frustrated by the lack of support they received from government departments. While many local government authorities would waive fees for road closures and cleaning costs, this was not always the case. Risk management and a commitment to 'duty of care' now requires adults working with young people to have had a police clearance. Security protocols including obvious security staff presence and bag searches are now common place at community gatherings.

Risk management is impacting on both levels of engagement and how people contribute to community as the following examples concerning Christmas demonstrates.

> Men are too scared to put on the red suit…the fear of saying the wrong things to children or acting in the wrong manner had become so great that people were becoming frightened to play Santa (Spagnolo, 2004).

> Fear of litigation has meant finding people has become more difficult. Potential Santas need to attend a two day course where you are told you must not be photographed with a child unless your hands are in full view of onlookers, never promise anything to a child, never be alone with child, get permission before putting children on your lap, never pat children on the head, don't say ho ho ho as this will frighten them, lift children down carefully because of the potential of injuring them… (Lampathakis, 2004).

Last Christmas my local shopping centre did not collect Christmas gifts for distribution within the community because of the fear of a bombs being placed in the collection (O'Keefe, 2005).

An interesting countertrend in response to the increased focus on terrorism that seems to have emerged since September 11, 2001 can be illustrated in the report by Helen Signy in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on January 9, 2003.

> Far from shunning public gatherings because of the threat of terrorist attacks, based on ticket sales, Australians are flocking to events in record numbers. Peter Stirling Benson who is in charge of Ticketek, a major event ticketing company, believes this is in response to the "need for feel-good factor". He also noted a "sense of bravado amongst the crowds" (Signy, 2003).

The increasing focus on risk management can be illustrated by looking at *Schoolies* week. Government and non-government organisations have intervened to better control the event in response to both community protest at the behaviour of young people and at the request of the event organiser who was concerned about not being able to meet legal liability and public safety concerns. Furthermore, a harm minimisation approach has been adopted in response to reported risk taking

behaviours[5]. The Queensland state government now runs a *Schoolies Festival*. This festival seeks to encourage young people to participate in a series of structured events. As Amy Lawson and Michael Crew (2004) reported:

> School leavers who register with the event organisers will receive an ID bracelet for free access to concerts and events and two free meals a day. They will be sent text messages from mascot DJ Betty about activities plus emergency phone numbers and health and safety tips.

Sally Freud, spokeswoman for event organiser *Media Rare*, said activities attempt to tire schoolies out and cut down on drinking. "We want them to be exhausted, go back to their hotels to sleep and do it again the next day" (interviewed in Lawson and Crew, 2004).

5.3.5 Media

We are more likely to be watching television than out socialising with people. On average Australians watch more than three hours per day (Mackay, 2005a). And what we are watching is directly impacting on how and what we celebrate. For example, the high percentage of American shows on Australian television has led to the popularity of American styled celebrations including *Halloween* and formal high school *graduation ceremonies*. Celebrations are also occurring with and around media. For example, the celebrations associated with reality shows such as 'Big Brother' and 'Idol'. Other shows become vehicles around which groups socialise. This phenomena was first noted with the weekly parties held around the 1990's television show *Melrose Place*.

Edmund O'Sullivan states, "In television as a cultural mediator, we can see our culture's dominant story and vision rehearsed" (1999, p. 125). As such it is a powerful educational tool. While this can be beneficial, Edmund O'Sullivan (1999) argues that the mass media is fostering a culture of violence and passivity. Others such as reporter Steve Cannane are concerned about how the media values the

[5] Reported levels of unsafe sex among school leavers (15%), fights (9% females, 14% males) (Salom, Watts, Kinner and Young, 2005)

superficial, "… when the people who get 'celebrated' are chefs, models, celebrity real estate agents and wine snobs, we're in trouble" (2004).

5.3.6 Cultural appropriation

The influence of media and widespread travel has led to people having more access to information, services and products for almost anything, including cultural practices and symbols. Cultural tourism is major business. One by-product has been the appropriation of cultural forms, practices, signs and symbols and as anthropologist Tom Selwyn notes "leading to a continuous process of reformulating and hybridising of cultures" (in Johnson 2002, p. 697). This has occurred within both the commercial and private spheres.

This raises the issue of 'ownership' of particular cultural expressions. This is a tension between recognising the fusion of cultural practices, ideas and traditions that is arising within the contemporary global context, and the need to identify with and protect, traditional approaches that give people a sense of identity and empowerment. The later is particularly important when cultural appropriation occurs of the most marginalised in society such as indigenous groups who are least able to defend or protect 'their' culture.

Appropriation of such traditional cultural forms without consent and using them for example to produce mass commercial commodities demonstrates a lack of respect and is inherently unethical. It is important to recognise that these may be deliberate actions in order to exploit the relationships people have with them in order to influence people's behaviours.

There is much to be gained when people share their cultural views and practices with others. For example, many individualistic communities particularly those driven by neo-liberal agendas have much to learn from more community oriented cultures including Australian aboriginal cultures. These cultures often emphasise the need for ceremony in supporting community connection to each other and the land. Providing opportunities where views, values and experiences be they traditional and/or

contemporary can be shared is important. Even more so is ensuring this is done with respect and valuing of associated symbols and practices.

5.3.7 A growing concern with the social and environmental impact of celebrations

Within the event management sector the major focus to date has been on economic and tourism development. The social and environmental impacts of celebrations have been virtually ignored. But there has been interest in broadening this scope particularly within the local government sector by adopting a 'triple bottom line' approach which focuses on economic, social and environmental outcomes (Hede, Jago and Deery, 2002). Further, there is greater understanding that economic growth does not necessarily lead to more community wellbeing (Hamilton, 2004) and within the event sector that events have low likelihood of lasting if not aligned to social and environmental values of the local community (Fredline, Jago and Deery, 2002).

The social benefits of celebrations are recognised by the local government sector. Michelle Hall who presented at a forum I convened with the Centre for Popular Education at UTS, said:

> *Festivals are an integral part of local communities. This is recognised by the Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW who has undertaken in the past five years to utilise creativity and arts practice to assist in the social and economic development of communities. The Associations recognise:*
>
> - *Through cultural activities every citizen, regardless of who they are, can play a role in reactivating the spirit of their community.*
> - *Many social, economic and environmental benefits can be obtained by integrating cultural development within the local government framework.*

- *Cultural development provides the opportunity for local government and their communities to collaborate to address the issues facing their community.*
- *It essentially provides the opportunity for every citizen to feel a sense of place and actively contribute to the growth of that community* (March, 2002).

Social gains brought about by celebrations are also being increasingly recognised by other government departments. For example, VicHealth, a statutory authority for health promotion in Victoria funds community festivals as part of its mental health strategy. This strategy seeks to foster social inclusion and value diversity. Several Councils such as the City of Melbourne are actively using street gatherings to foster social connections. They are also being viewed as accelerating urban renewal and city regeneration policies (Masucci and Raviola, 2005). Subsequently the private sector is responding to such interests. For example, *Creating Communities* (see www.creatingcommunities.com.au) is a private company in the state of Western Australia and seeks to give competitive advantage to land developers by developing community development plans as part of their overall proposal. They utilise events as a key community building strategy.

The third dimension of the 'triple bottom line' is the environment. This is an important dimension both from a waste management and education perspective. This aspect will be discussed in later chapters.

5.4 Taking control

Discussions with people would suggest that increasingly many people are creating their own personally meaningful celebration forms and practices. Cameron believes:

> Because so many people are deeply, or vaguely dissatisfied with available rites (religious or commercial) they are increasingly taking the rites back into their own hands and having adjunct private and public rituals (2004, p. 120).

This is demonstrated by the fact that over half of the marriages registered in Australia in 2004, were presided over by civil celebrants, confirming a trend which has seen the steady growth of civil ceremonies from 39% in 1983 to 42% in 1993 to 59% in 2004 (ABS, 2005). Wedding formats have changed to accommodate cross-cultural unions, second-time marriages, same-sex partnerships, and children from previous marriages (Skelly, 2005; Stronghart in Etzioni, 2000). End of a marriage, termination of a pregnancy, namings, suicide, facing the drought are just some examples of other rituals Reverend Dorothy McRae-McMahon has provided in her book, *Rituals for Love, Life and Loss* (2003).

During the course of this research I had many conversations with people who had created their own celebration be it for a birthday, rites of passage, funeral, wedding or a graduation. Several discussed how they did not identify with or find traditional religious celebrations relevant to them.

There were many examples where people created celebrations that were responsive to the individual interests and values. Some drew on commercial products available such the *Street Party Packs* (City of Melbourne, date not published) offered by local government or the many magazines such as *Sydney Party! Annual* which have articles on parties and festivities. Although most simply reflected upon what this celebration meant to them and the people around them.

One example was the *Welcome to the World* ceremony I facilitated with my friends. Both the parents wanted to introduce their daughter to their family and friends and invite them to be part of her life. Neither had religious affiliations and did not want a Christening or even a naming ceremony. So they read books and talked with me and others to get ideas. They eventually came up with their own ceremony, words and symbols which drew on the journey they had shared together. They held their own celebration in their back yard with a small gathering of their family and friends.

However, while there are those who are actively creating their own celebrations there are equally many, if not more, people who lack confidence in doing so. The conclusion I drew from my interviews and conversations was that there was either uncertainty as to whether it is ‘ok’ for them to take control of their celebrations or

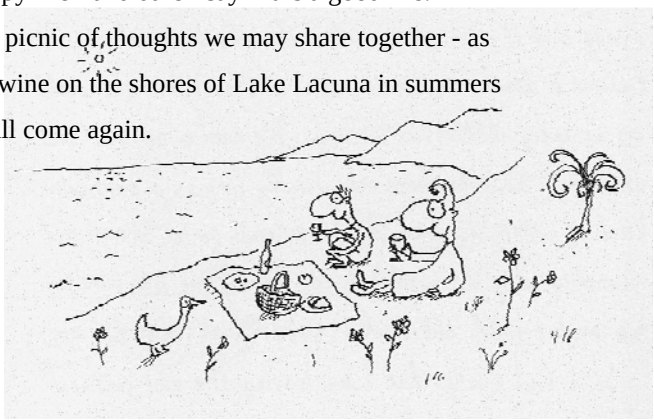
they simply did not feel skilled to do so. Others still commented how they intended to do things differently but due to other people's expectations and lack of time and energy ended up adopting traditional formats with simply an added touch or two that reflected their own personality.

The next section will describe and discuss the relationship between celebrations and the various dimensions of health.

SECTION 2: CELEBRATIONS, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

This section analyses how celebrations can contribute to the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. It commences by defining health and wellbeing and then moves on to examine how celebration can contribute to healthy development across the lifespan, the contribution it makes to meaning and identity and, the potential for fostering connectedness and building community capacity.

> Dear Vasco
> It is the shortest day here in Curly Flat - the winter solstice. We had a very interesting time trying to measure this shortest day. How does one measure a day? Length is one matter but depth and width are just as important. For instance, a short day may be very deep or a long day may be shallow and narrow. What seems to be vital is whether or not the day is spacious, in which case the roundedness of the day is perhaps the most important factor. After all, a round day holds happiness most successfully - happiness itself being of a rounded shape, as you have observed.
> The shortest day always reminds me life is short but no sooner am I conscious of that than I am reminded that life is also very long. This is a most comforting paradox, for when I know that it is short, life seems more precious and sweet. I am overcome with a great sense of forgiveness and my sufferings seem more bearable and fleeting - in fact they almost feel like blessings. And when I know that life is long I am reassured and contented that the great wheel will surely turn and natural justice will come to pass most certainly. But once again Vasco, it is not the length of life which is important, it is the shape and the spaciousness - for therein lies the potential for a beautiful freedom. It is roundness of life which matters. A round life is surely a happy life - and dare I say - it is a good life.
> Please consider these reflections as a small picnic of thoughts we may share together - as we have shared picnics of sandwiches and wine on the shores of Lake Lacuna in summers past. Those were happy days - and they will come again.
> Farewell Vasco!
> With salutes and smiles,
> Mr Curly
>
> (Leunig 2001, p. 51)



Chapter 6: Defining Health and Wellbeing

In the preceding poem Michael Leunig suggests it is the roundedness of life that leads to a happy life. For me, this concept of roundedness is similar to the concept of wellbeing. I believe celebrations contribute to a well-rounded life and subsequently, wellbeing. The concept of wellbeing is directly related to health.

6.1 What is health?

> Wellbeing comes from being connected and engaged, from being suspended in a web of relationships and interests which give meaning to our lives. The intimacy, belonging and support provided by close personal relationships seems to matter most; isolation exacts the highest price (Eckersley 2005, p. 10).

There is no one definition of health. Health is a culturally defined construct. Health is important as it directly influences the quality of our lived existence. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (1948) asserts that health sits on a continuum from death to illness to optimum physical, mental and social wellbeing. In recent times various commentators have advocated for the inclusion of spiritual and environmental dimensions, and the reinforcement of the interdependence or interconnectedness between the dimensions (Brown, Gootjans, Ritchie, Townsend and Verrinder, 2005). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders consistently advocate that health is intertwined with the land. "Ill-health in an indigenous community calls for a diagnosis of how the land is failing to be protected and maintained" (Mills in Brown 2005, p. 143).

Similar integrated approaches are also popular within the 'complementary health' sector. One such approach is that offered by philosopher Ken Wilber (2005). He recognises that "body, mind and spirit are operating in self and culture and nature, and thus health and healing, sickness and wholeness are bound up in a multidimensional tapestry" (p. xxxi). His four-quadrant integral model recognises the interiors of the individual (thoughts, feelings, values, meanings, beliefs); the exteriors of individuals (atoms, molecules, behaviours); the interior of the collective (shared cultural beliefs,

inter-subjective understanding) and the exterior of the collective (ecosystems, tribes, nation states).

Health then is influenced by our genetic predispositions (as we age and what we inherit), behaviours and experiences (and our subjective cognitive, emotional interpretations of these) and the external conditions in which they interact (for example, social structures and resources, cultural values, environment). To become fully whole, reaching one's potential at any point is reliant on opportunities for healthy growth and development, and for healing. In taking such a view, health is not a destination. It is a dynamic process which changes as part of the ongoing life cycle.

6.2 Contemporary health discourses

> The medical model always bears a hidden negative assumption that what is important about a person is his or her injury, disease, deficiency, problem, need, empty half. The able, gifted, skilled, capable, and full part of a person is not the focus of the medical model. And yet communities are built upon the capacities of people, not their deficiencies (McKnight, 1994 p. 28).

While most of the publicly funded health services in Australia are directed towards the physiological dimensions of health and treating illness, there is increasing attention being paid to the mental and social determinants of health (WHO, VicHealth and University of Melbourne, 2004). There is also recognition of the importance of our early life experiences on our wellbeing over the course of our lifespan (Spooner, Hall and Lynskey, 2001). A body of research is also validating a positive as opposed to 'ill-health' or negative approach to health. This research is demonstrating that having a positive and optimistic outlook, and positive experiences can have a positive physiological impact on our physical, mental and social selves. (A summary of the literature can be found in Snyder and Lopez, 2002.) Daniel Goleman in his book *Emotional Intelligence* writes:

> People who experienced chronic anxiety, long periods of sadness and pessimism, unremitting tension or incessant hostility, relentless cynicism or suspiciousness, were found

> to have double the risk of disease - including asthma, arthritis, headaches, peptic ulcers, and heart disease (1995, p. 169).

Michael Argyle in his book, "The Psychology of Happiness" summarises research which shows

> that positive moods provide occasions for play (hence learning skills), exploration, reflection, integration and social bonding. Good moods produce social behaviour that is warm and generous, resulting in mutual liking (2001, p. 221).

He goes on to suggest that positive moods lead to engaging in more work and creative thinking in ways that build other resources and leads to happiness. Even the simple experience of laughing has been found to be good for health (Penson, Partridge, Rudd, Seiden, Nelson, Chabner and Lynch, 2005).

Beyond the individual the importance of addressing the social determinants of health is now acknowledged. These include government policies, education, employment, occupation, income, housing and psycho-social factors such as a person's sense of control, stress, social inclusion, self-esteem, resilience, meaning and purpose, and expectations (Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003). As stated by the World Health Organisation, VicHealth and the University of Melbourne "mental health is affected by individual factors and experiences, social interaction, societal structures and resources and cultural values" (2004, p. 13).

A comprehensive view of health that incorporates both the individual and broader determinants of health is offered by psychologists Isaac Prilleltensky and Geoff Nelson (2002). In their examination of wellbeing they identify the synergistic relationship that occurs between the personal, the relational and the collective, and the psychological, the political context and social needs and the values that influence action at each of these levels. They argue:

> At the personal level, individuals have to meet needs for a sense of control, hope, optimism, physical and psychological growth, stimulation, health, meaning and spirituality. At the second level, healthy relations need to satisfy requirements for mutual respect, appreciation for diversity, caring and compassion. At the third level, communities have to promote a fair

> and equitable distribution of power and resources, democratic means to make decisions, adequate access to health services, decent housing and employment, a clean environment, accessible transportation and food security (in Evans and Prilleltensky, forthcoming).

These needs are met by coherent values, adequate psychological and material resources, and by effective social policies and programs. Prilleltensky and Fox seek to take into account both positive and negative political and psychological dynamics.

> Positive psychological forces include hope, empathy, optimism, attachment, and social support. Positive political forces include the power to distribute resources equitably, the capacity to claim human rights, and societal structures that maintain democracy and civic participation. Negative psychological forces include verbal abuse, stigmatisation, and acquired, polarised, and affective distortions. Negative political forces include oppression, exploitation, discrimination, and invested distortions based on power inequality (forthcoming).

Isaac Prilleltensky (forthcoming a) believes the challenge is in creating spaces in communities and social contacts where the balance among personal, relational and collective needs can be pursued. I believe celebrations can mediate between people, places, life and community stages and values.

6.3 How can celebrations contribute to health and wellbeing?

> On the one hand, millions of dollars are committed to alleviating ill-health through individual intervention. Meanwhile we ignore what our everyday experience tells us, the way we organise our society, the extent to which we encourage interaction among the citizenry and the degree to which we trust and associate with each other in caring communities is probably the most important determinant of our health (Lomas in WHO, VicHealth and University of Melbourne 2004, p. 22).

In examining the role of holidays and celebrations within the occupational therapy context, Luboshitzky and Gaber (2001) found celebrations enable the interaction of the physical, mental and spiritual within an individual's personal, familial, social, religious and cultural environment. In discussing ritual Cameron stated, "ritual marks

the threshold between communal, cultural structures and personal psycho-physiological processes" (2004, p. 20).

Fiese, Tomcho, Douglas, Josephs, Poltrock and Baker (2002) found routines and rituals are important regulators of development. Moriaty and Wagner (2004) found the value of family rituals was in facilitating family cohesion and instilling family values. And there is awareness that people's customs and traditions and the beliefs of their family and community, all affect their health. Someone's culture will influence what they think, feel, do and believe to be important (Helman, 2000).

Celebrations engage the creative arts. There has been a small amount of research conducted in Australia and the United Kingdom in particular. One of the key pieces of research conducted in Australia was by Deidre Williams in 1996 . She looked at the long- term benefits of community-based arts funding. She found community arts can make a positive contribution to social capital but the precise nature of the relationship was not explored. Her research and other researching community arts practice is summarised by McQueen-Thompson and Ziguras (2002) from the RMIT Globalism Institute. A subsequent literature review conducted by them found that arts practice, and participatory arts practices in particular, has beneficial mental health outcomes.

> The emerging consensus among researchers is that celebration or festivals can promote community co-operation, bring new talents to a community and develop those within, promote awareness of community issues, reduce the isolation of individuals and groups within community and promote economic and social development (McQueen-Thomson, James and Ziguras 2004, p. 7).

Delamere and Hinch found the top five social benefits of community festivals (in order) are establishing community pride, social interaction, togetherness and sharing of ideas, community identity and community wellness.

> The development of organisational expertise, the encouragement of an exchange of ideas and the sharing of values all help to unify people and groups which form the community. The hosting of a festival was also perceived as helping to articulate or define the character of a community. Community identity was seen to be strengthened both inside and outside

> the community. It helped to provide a 'sense of place' for local residents, while at the same time representing something special and unique to potential guests of the community. Community wellness was also valued as an important benefit; indicative of an active, vital, and participation-oriented community (1994, p. 28).

Masucci and Raviola (2005) in reviewing the evidence examining festivals and special events found they contribute to social cohesion, cultural exchange, revitalise local traditions, increase quality of life and improve the image of the community, pride, cultural identity, cohesion and increased cultural knowledge.

Health is a useful framework for analysing cultural activities such as celebrations as it crosses disciplines, it is something shared by all individuals and communities. It can be explored in concentric circles - personal and collectives (family, interest groups) and the contexts in which we live (localities, social, political and the environmental).

Celebrations have the potential to make a positive contribution to health and wellbeing, as both a setting, and as a process. More specifically, they have the potential to:

1. contribute towards healthy lifespan development for the individual;
2. facilitate personal and social healing; and
3. enhance social, mental, emotional, physical and spiritual growth for both individuals and communities.

6.4 Current health promotion practices and celebrations

I am interested in health promotion which seeks to maximise quality of life both through interventions at an individual and population level. To date, the majority of health promotion efforts in and around celebrations has been on targeting individual behaviours such as diet, physical activity, smoking, alcohol use and use of health care. Subsequently the focus has been on celebrations as a setting for 'promoting' health. This has typically included offering lifestyle assessments, promoting health messages, providing health information and creating healthy environments such as providing sun

protection, non-smoking venues, healthy food options and responsible alcohol serving practices.

Alcohol and to a lesser extent illegal drug use such as amphetamines plays a major role in the cultural lives of many Australians, particularly younger people. The role of getting drunk is a well recognised rite of passage for many young Australians and associated with most celebratory activities (Midford, Young and Farringdon, 2002). Columnist with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Stephanie Dowrick explains:

> We live in a country where it is acceptable to be drunk. Dangerous levels of alcohol consumption are confused with notions of sociability. 'Celebration' often involves at least some people becoming so drunk they can't remember what they are celebrating. People who struggle to limit their drinking are often pilloried. Many parents see excessive drinking as inevitable as their children move into adolescence (2006a, p. 57).

Subsequently substantial public health resources have been invested in social marketing campaigns and fostering supportive environments that seek to minimise harm by reducing binge drinking and hence reducing the social impact of excess consumption wchhich can lead to unsafe sex and violence. The National Drugs Campaign undertaking by the Australian federal government is a typical example (www.drugs.health.gov.au). The Roads and Traffic Authority with Youthsafe have developed guidelines on *Developing safe celebrating: Strategies for young people* (Hunter, Alcock, Elkington, 2003). The Department of Education Science and Training conducted a harm minimisation project targeting school leaver celebrations on Rottnest Island in Western Australia (Midford, Young and Farringdon, 2002). Prior to the celebration drug education talks were held with school leavers and parents. During the celebrations health messages were promoted, alcohol restrictions were imposed, prices were increased, a recovery room, food and an afternoon music program was provided, young people's identification was checked and there was an increased security and police presence.

In line with a more social determinants approach to health VicHealth actively recognises community celebrations as vehicles for addressing mental health and wellbeing. Their *Communities Together* funding scheme (VicHealth, 2006a) provides

grants to community groups to create inclusive community-driven festivals and celebrations.

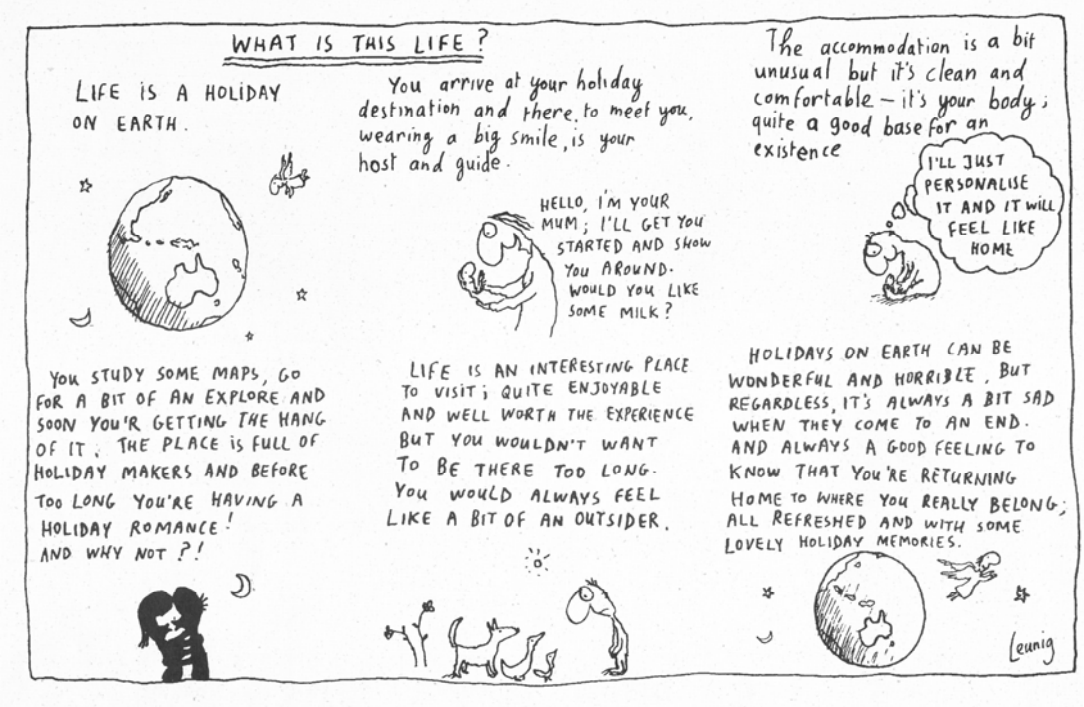
I believe celebrations can be viewed as a health promotional activity that can foster personal wellbeing and support relational wellbeing between the personal and the collective. The next chapter will explore how this can occur and in particular pay attention to the role of celebrations to health over the course of our lives, how celebrations can help foster healing and, how they can be painful and distressing experiences.

Chapter 7: Celebrations, Healthy Lifespan Development, Healing and Hurt

> A good life is a life of meaning, fulfilment and satisfaction. Similarly, a good society is one where personal lives can thrive. People usually have criteria against which they assess their lives. Each person has a perceived notion of what is meaningful and worthy in life (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 2002).

Abraham Maslow (in Suzuki and McConnell 1997, p. 157) acknowledges, "a baby is only potentially a human being and must grow into humanness in the society and the culture, the family". This chapter explores celebrations from the perspective of how they can contribute to healthy development.

7.1 Healthy lifespan development



(Leunig 2002, no page number listed)

Celebrations it would seem have always been an integral part of cultural life. They have been used as markers along the journey from birth to death. They have brought

communities together, been used to educate and to acknowledge changes and the passing of time. Presenting on the strand I convened on celebrations at the 2002 *Education and Social Action Conference*, Sydney, Pam Scanlan from the NSWHealth's Mental Health Unit highlighted the importance of acknowledging transitions and key events across the lifespan. Doing so, she argued can make an important contribution to healthy psychological development, particularly during the early years. The power of the arts in supporting healthy personal development and transformation has also been recognised (for example, Matarasso, 1997; Schmid, 2005). While within the therapeutic literature, ritual has been found to be both beneficial and detrimental (Davis, 1989; Deanna, 1994; Fiese, Tomcho, Douglas, Josephs, Poltrock and Baker, 2002; Imber-Black and Roberts, 1992; Markson and Fiese, 2000).

My observations and discussions with people lead me to conclude that celebrations can make a healthy contribution to personal development. They can let people know they belong to a community who will look out for them. For example, birthdays are opportunities to let people know they are loved, cared for and their own special uniqueness is valued. Celebration, ceremony and ritual can also support people to reflect, grieve or rejoice about the social, biological or cultural changes occurring in their lives. And so when significant events take place without any acknowledgement (personally or by the broader community) these I believe, are lost opportunities. Dorothy McRae-McMahon during a workshop she conducted on rituals in health care, which I convened at Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney, said, "*The truth is that extraordinary significant events can take place in peoples lives as though nothing has happened"* (2005a).

Richard Eckersley (1993) in his study of trends in suicide noted that there are few supported social contexts within Australia that acknowledge the transition from child to adult. He believes this is one factor contributing to the social and emotional distress young people are experiencing.

Acknowledging and providing a supportive context for the individual and the broader group to prepare for, and accept change, is beneficial. This allows an individual the opportunity to reflect on who they are and who they want to be. It allows people to

reflect on the relationship they have with themselves, others or the places where they live. These do not need to be formal affairs. I have found the informal Goddess gatherings I share with friends have nurtured me and validated my own personal journey as well as reminded me that I am interconnected to a broader community. Each gathering was similar but unique. The value and process of each gathering was to nurture and affirm, be non-judgemental and draw on what each person wishes to contribute. Each gathering would focus on what was currently relevant in people's lives, be it a birthday, recognising a challenge well met, or a transition that was occurring. Over time we gained a deep sense of connection from having journeyed together and sharing our stories of life's 'ups and downs'.

Celebrations can acknowledge a new relationship or provide an opportunity to redefine an existing one. A wedding can achieve both of these. The same can apply at the community level where festivals have been used by communities to facilitate change and "stimulate and inspire evolutions" (Derret 2000, p. 124). An example of this is how people in Wauchope who are experiencing significant population, economic and environmental changes, used story-making and -telling at 'community spirit dinners' to foster community understanding across the broader community.

7.2 Rites of passage

> There must be spaces and occasion to come together, to pause, to reflect, to heal and so to create the possibility of transformation (Reid 1997, p. 7).

How people develop cultural practices that assist with life transitions has been examined by anthropologists including Arnold Van Gennep (1965) and Victor Turner (1969) and cultural studies scholars. More recent studies can be found in the book *Crossroads* edited by Louise Mahdi, Nancy Christopher and Michael Meade (1996) and *Deeply into the Bone* by Ronald Grimes (2000). Key transition points such as from childhood to adulthood that were transformative were coined 'rites of passage' by Arnold Van Gennep. At such times, celebration and ritual provides a potentially supportive process and context where these transitions can be negotiated with safety. They can act as a symbolic marker, support people to adopt new roles and shift social

status and potentially make these disruptive transitions more manageable and less threatening (Imber-Black and Roberts, 1992; Turner, 1969, 1982b, Davidson, 2001, Davis, 2000; Gavazzi and Blumenkrantz, 1993; McCubbin and McCubbin, 1988). Myerhoff and Ruby write how celebrations and ritual can transform traumatic experiences or disorienting lonely episodes into commemorations that acknowledge change (1982).

When people name significant life-cycle events they mostly will discuss birth, marriage and death. The work of therapists and others has highlighted the value of celebration and ritual in positively adapting to biological changes during life as well as other social, physical and cultural changes such as separation and disconnection within social and cultural contexts such as starting school, moving house, changing jobs, puberty, menopause, surgery, leaving home, retirement, divorce, membership-restricted groups, redundancy, moving into a nursing home and name changes (Close, 1995; Dahlke, 1999; Imber-Black and Roberts, 1992; Hockey, Katz, Small, 2001; Myerhoff and Arbor, 1982).

The form and nature of celebrations will influence the degree to which they are transformative and health enhancing. Barbara Myerhoff, for example, believed all that was required to support change

> is a small community of friends or family, some symbolic and traditional resources for inspiration, a clear formulation of the change involved and its significance - and courage (in Turner 1982a, p. 26).

Others such as Paul Hall advocate more structured approaches drawing on long held traditions (2002). *Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras* is an example of celebration acting as a contemporary rite of passage. Herdt reports that in Chicago homosexuality was experienced in such negative terms that, "many remain closeted to avoid harassment, legal sanctions, and violence" (1992, p. 33). However, by the 1980s, Mardi Gras had raised community awareness and acceptance and Mardi Gras itself became part of the 'coming out' initiation. He goes on to state:

> Today, the political power of the gay and lesbian community suggests that coming out is more of a collective initiation rite, a public coming-of-age status-adjustment transition into the adult gay community (1992, p. 31).

This was my observation and from talking to young people, people from the country and other states who used the *Sydney Mardi Gras* to make a public statement about their sexuality. It provided a safe and supported space to do so and an opportunity to 'celebrate' it.

Within a contemporary context while a celebration itself can provide the focus for the change it is important to recognise that transitions sit within a much broader process, and context, that occurs over a period of time. The celebration provides a reason for people to come together. Preparation for celebrations and rituals enable social interactions to occur, expectations to be formed, assumptions challenged and the resulting celebrations to be negotiated. That people need to be ready for change is well acknowledged by psychologists (see Prochaska and DiClemente, 1992). Accounts of 'traditional' ceremonies and rituals suggest they often incorporated elements that allowed the individuals and communities to get ready for an impending change as well as 'celebrating' and acknowledging the change that has occurred (Turner, 1982a; Van Gennep, 1960).

One of the key transition points in our lifespan is that from adolescent to adult. Richard Waterhouse, historian at the University of Sydney suggests that in Australia since colonisation, rites of passage invariably were linked to membership to a particular tribe such as religious or sporting groups (Delaney, 2005). However, Cameron comments that within contemporary Australia, "…young people are transforming at different speeds and intensities, at different levels and within different cultural milieus" (2004, p. 39). And adults have not provided supportive structures for such transformations.

Timing of adolescent transitions has changed over the past century, with a longer period of adolescence, longer periods as students, and delayed entry as adults to work settings or before leaving home to live independently. Subsequently, there is no single marker but often a series of markers such as getting a drivers licence, school

balls, losing virginity, 18th and 21st birthday parties and overseas travel. The age of adulthood is more likely to be linked to purchasing a home or marriage which now is not occurring for the majority of people until their 30's.

A common expression is: "It takes a community to raise a child". This places some responsibility on our communities to provide supportive contexts for children and young people to engage in positive celebration experiences. The opportunity for a young person to engage in ceremonies and celebrations marking a transition to adult varies between communities. Attitudes towards celebrations are influenced by family networks and what traditions they support and/or new traditions that are being created. I suspect that it is those not belonging to more defined communities, either religious and cultural, who would be least likely to participate in structured ceremonies that acknowledge the transition to adulthood.

Rites of passage experiences can sometimes occur by default. *Sydney Dreaming* fused traditional Aboriginal dreaming stories with contemporary and traditional performance. While it was not designed as a 'rites of passage' it was viewed by the festival director as having had this function for many of the young people involved who had not experienced anything similar in the past. This was perceived as important as circumstances often lead them to be excluded from other contemporary forms of rites of passage such as school balls.

More research is needed from the perspective of young people themselves to determine the degree to which traditional or contemporary rites of passage are transformational and health enhancing. Newspaper reports would suggest events such as *Schoolies* that have emerged in recent years at best are "…a fairly harmless affair, just a good laugh and a dance marathon" (Baird, 2002). And at their worst such celebrations are an initiation into the 'Aussie drug culture'.

Another major transition that occurs within communities is that of death. Research by anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff with the Jewish elderly highlighted the importance of ritual in dealing with old age and death. This was also found in recent research conducted at Prince of Wales Hospital (Parmagos, O'Connell and Hilbers, 2004) with the Greek, Chinese and Russian communities. Traditional rituals offered comfort and

provided a framework that enabled relatives and friends to provide support. As Friedman notes,

> death creates a vacuum, and emotional systems, and physical systems, will rush to fill it…if one is going to take advantage of that period, the funeral, its preparations, and its 'celebration' can be a crystallising experience (1988, p. 440).

A funeral is a rite of passage for both a person who has died as well as their community. For the community, it is often a time of acknowledging what has occurred, letting go, grieving, of allowing a person to become an ancestor and in some cases re-defining their own social role such as from wife to widow. The form this takes is culturally determined. For example, funerals are viewed as celebration of life within some Celtic, West African and Mexican cultural groups. For others, it is an intense period of mourning. Either way, as Reverend Dorothy McRae-McMahon (2005a) believes, the value of a funeral is that it takes people through a constructed process that enables people to deal with whatever emotions they are experiencing.

Cameron is concerned about how funerals are being removed from the public view. He comments on the degree to which commercial operators are de-personalising their format.

> The whole event is organised with the minimum of personal involvement and its almost clinical and antiseptic in its approach. The service is often fitted into a tight schedule to last a prescribed amount of time and is the same for each group (1993, p. 177).

In later work, Cameron notes, often the celebrant or minister of ceremonies has no familiarity with the person who has died and funerals often do not represent what the person believed in life (2004, p. 119). My discussions with celebrants suggest that funeral directors are seeking more control over funeral ceremonies through the regulation of fees. One celebrant I spoke to mentioned that she is now no longer permitted to facilitate funeral ceremonies at the local funeral parlours because of the 'extended' time that it sometimes takes. Such trends I would suggest are likely to contribute to distress being exacerbated at the individual level and at the community level. People will no longer be provided with safe spaces and processes to deal with their emotions. As a community too this contributes to a death-denying culture which

enhances fear of death. As Octavio Paz warns, "a culture that begins by denying death will end by denying life" (in Meade, no publication date listed).

The power of personally meaningful gatherings to deal with end-of-life is illustrated by the following narrative by one friend of her brother's last days and his funeral which I also attended.

> *Seven months after my brother Jamie[6] was diagnosed with cancer he passed away at home. His beloved partner Sue was by his side guiding him to focus on his breath and to visualise white light pouring through him. Meditation music surrounded them and beams of sunshine came through the window. Two hours later the inner circle of support people were eating a sumptuous lunch of baked snapper and salad in the backyard under the sun and toasting Jamie with a glass of wine.*
>
> *My oldest brother Peter said at the funeral that it had been Jamie's dream to make a film and that in a sense the whole process of his passing was like a film with Jamie being the director and we being the actors, producers and run-abouts. He coached us and facilitated some amazing beautiful sharing with people one-to-one and in small groups. For 'The Last Jam Session' he invited friends to play music, sing, eat, draw and be merry.*
>
> *We allowed a week between his death and the funeral. Time was needed to prepare for the event and the party afterwards. Jamie had made a CD of music he wanted played and his wish was that the scene would look like a particular music video he once made.*
>
> *The backyard became the scene for the funeral ceremony. The neighbouring fence and clothes hoist were pulled down (the fence was put back up later), the yard mowed, shrubs pruned, and new plants gathered and planted. Chinese lanterns, candles, incense, rose petals and a cannon. Seating was organised. We went searching for a minister of religion at the*

[6] Names have been changed

request of our parents and found a man who felt right. He was happy to introduce people, offer helpful suggestions and allow us to decide how the day would be.

Bright clear sunshine shone for the big day. Chinese lanterns transformed the backyard and a purple and gold altar was created on the patio incorporating water and sand from Bondi Beach, a huge candle, photographs, fern, flowers, a camera. Artist friends had worked for days on this. While the backyard hummed with activity a second team of artists were preparing the Wake venue in a similar style. Coloured and fairy lights, sound equipment and catering were extra 'to do's' for the night time party. Laughter and tears mixed with helpful, creative hard work created warmth and colour.

Jamie's friends were asked to bring a single flower to the ceremony. They entered the yard along the path over scattered rose petals to line up at the casket, place their flower and honour him. So many beautiful people, so many beautiful flowers. The backyard swept up from the porch/stage/altar like an amphitheatre. Jamie's partner, siblings and friends spoke and sang for him. Throughout the ceremony there were cheers and whistles. The atmosphere was one of celebration. The grand finale as the casket was wheeled out was an extraordinary cannon firing rose petals over those gathered.

A handful of people attended a private cremation. Some hours later under a full moon on top of a seven story building - and the top floor where Jamie had a photographic studio - was transformed into a performance space. Live music, wine, food, dancing and performance filled the night. Dancing under the full moon felt so good. Tensions of the past months caring for Jamie were released. The closing line of a poem read by one of Jamie's friends was, "If you look carefully at the full moon you will see a tall thin man riding his chrome bicycle". That night we really could.

7.3 Celebrations for healing

> Healing the past helps restructure the present, which then becomes the hope for the future (Linn 1998, p. 20).

Involvement in a community celebration provides an opportunity for healing and personal growth. The community cultural development worker of the *Cooking Stories*[7] project presented at a workshop I convened and told how the refugees involved found telling their stories was personally healing. A 'bash' held for the Berringama, Lucyvale and Wabba[8] communities in Victoria provided relief from the stresses of drought, bushfires, war and terrorism. The *Ouyen Rain-dance*[9] came to be in response to a local farmer joking about a reference made to Nepalese rain-dances on the radio. He suggested to his wife that this is something the women in the area could do given they had been in drought for several years. His wife took him up on it and organised a 'naked' rain-dance that drew over 500 women. The women found it an *"exhilarating experience"*. For many they were able to *"break through the body boundary story as well"* (ritual facilitator, Ouyen Rain-dance).

The local Aboriginal community in Horsham are now actively involved in the annual *Art Is…* festival[10]. The experience for at least one Aboriginal artist was healing.

> *I learnt so much about inner self. I grew a lot personally and learnt to express experiences of assimilation, stolen generation through poetry and artwork…sharing with others, educates them but is healing for myself.*

Healing was also a theme within the interviews I conducted at the *CERES Autumn Harvest Festival*.

> *It is a healing festival in its very core. It's about stating and celebrating that there can be no personal health without ecological health without*

[7] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.
[8] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.
[9] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.
[10] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

> *community health without meaningful connection to place, and that all these things together create spiritual health* (volunteer and original organiser, CERES Autumn Harvest Festival).

One of the cultural teachers who brought along a group of participants who had been refugees said:

> *For them to go there [CERES Autumn Harvest Festival] cuts down on counselling and doctor's appointments. Often the doctor for them is a chance to talk and feel cared for. But being part of CERES can fill this sort of role. I have noticed that they can cut down on sleeping pills because they feel more relaxed.*

People provided examples of special moments, performances or times where people took a risk which was part of their own healing. This moved and inspired others. For example, the *Where the Heart Is*[11] festival sought to celebrate the lives and skills of the diverse population who make up the homeless and marginally housed population in Melbourne. One of the community workers gave the following account.

> *One lady had a lot of anxiety about going on stage, amazing to listen to her sing and the band she got together. It was a huge part of her life - to gather, organise a band, conduct rehearsals. An important part of healing. She is quite physically debilitated. On stage she didn't need her frame and she could do all the moves…She was a different person. You get those individual stories…just extraordinary.*

Amitai Etzioni describes and discusses research that would indicate rituals engaged in during celebrations can affect those who attend by facilitating coping, relieving tension, expressing emotion and dealing with conflict (Etzioni 2000). They can add depth to the emotional experience of celebrations.

[11] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

Community gatherings, rituals and celebrations can also provide a sanctioned space to deal with ongoing challenges. As a friend would say when discussing funerals, *'they can contribute towards the healing or they can contribute towards the hurt'*. Not mourning publicly or even having 'tools' to mourn privately leaves people carrying around the weight of grief alone. As another friend mentioned, *"not having a funeral of any kind to go to for my dear friend when she died last April has left a terrible feeling of a loss unshared"*. One group of workers I spoke with who were being forced to relocate premises held a *Wake* for their old premises and a welcoming ceremony when they moved to the new premises. Community ritual was a feature of the way communities responded to September 11, the Bali bombings and the December 2004 Asian Tsunami. There were religious ceremonies and the unveiling of memorial sculptures and personal rituals were conducted at informal gatherings.

Celebrations do not always have to be elaborate. One health worker explained at her hospice there is a monthly pot-luck luncheon for bereaved people.

> *The only ritual involved is coming together bearing food, but that's all they need for encouragement, and after all, that's pretty elemental human celebration.*

A workshop by Dorothy MaCrae-McMahon on the use of ritual highlighted the healing power of ritual in dealing with health crises and loss. She cited examples of the use of ritual to acknowledge major life changes such as organ donation and how it is healing for the recipient and for the family and friends of the organ donor. Celebratory approaches have been found to be beneficial for people in support groups (Ruffing-Rahal, 1993). For example, one nurse explained how the breast cancer support group she is involved with celebrates life, each other and their personal achievements rather than continually grieving their losses.

Celebrations and rituals can mark and celebrate significant steps in the journey away from a problem to a new preferred solution. When they do so they transform how the community see themselves and how people subsequently interact with each other. For

example, the *Snowy Errinundra Bike Ride*[12] held over four days, involved bike riders traveling from town to town in the day and social gatherings in the evening was the first time people who had previously been in conflict over the logging of local forests successfully worked together on a common project.

> *…the bike ride has created a story different from the previous one… it is a story of where they co-operated* (director, Community Health).

At a broader level, celebrations such as public holidays provide a time for the community to rest. In economically driven times there are few times when the whole of community has the potential to do so. In Australia, *Christmas Day* and *Good Friday* are the only days where most business and retail outlets are closed. Many take leave from work during the Christmas to New Year period. Shops close, traffic declines and there is a sense within the community of being 'on holiday'.

Celebrations can provide a forum to acknowledge pain and trauma and to identify strengths to inspire a better future. For much of Australian history, Aboriginal Australians have been invisible within larger public celebrations. As discussed previously, *Invasion or Survival Day* and the many reconciliation initiatives such as the bridge walks, welcome to land ceremonies, the opening ceremony and festival program of the *Sydney 2000 Olympic Games* held in recent years have done much in recognising their status as first nation peoples and acknowledging past, and current, traumas experienced by Aboriginal communities.

Such approaches are a form of 'social healing'. Social healing is defined by O'Dea as a process that

> seeks to deal with wounds created by conflict, collective trauma and large-scale oppression. It seeks to identify areas of collective experience, which remain unresolved, neglected and repressed within the psyche of groups and even nations… Its primary modalities are truth, reconciliation, forgiveness and restorative justice (2004, p. 569).

[12] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

Several Aboriginal elders and community leaders I spoke with highlighted the role of Aboriginal festivals in acting as modern day corroborees that help to keep Aboriginal culture alive. Further, they provided spaces for positive and joyful interactions and where it was needed, community healing. Aboriginal festivals are now held across the country (for example, *Garma Festival, Barunga Festival, Dreaming Festival, Stamping Ground, Beanie Festival, Croc Fest*).

7.4 Celebrations as difficult times

7.4.1 For the individual

> …mental anguish, public embarrassment, psychological damage, strained relationships, political and social alienation are only some of the consequences of rituals and celebrations going wrong (Cameron 2004, p. 20).

Celebrations do not always elicit positive emotions. Rather they can do the opposite. There is a small amount of discussion within the therapeutic health literature about how community celebrations can elicit conflict (Leach and Braithwaite in Fiese, Tomcho, Douglas, Josephs, Poltrock and Baker, 2002), be times that reinforce loneliness and the lack of a social network, trigger grief and loss (of people, animals and places), be stressful and lead to anxiety, panic attacks and phobias, depression and even suicide attempts (Luboshitzky and Gaber, 2001). Christmas is a peak time for domestic violence and marriage breakdown (Berry, 2006). Websites such as www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au and www.bereavementcare.com.au provide tips to help people survive special anniversaries and celebrations. There are numerous articles in the popular press such as one by Ben Bruce entitled - *Surviving Christmas* (2005).

Many of the festival organisers I interviewed provided examples of how they found organising events stressful or even traumatic.

> *One event manager had a terrible time. The logistics of working with different people can be disappointing, people are late, don't ring* (festival director, CERES).

> *I find it difficult dealing with all the difference of opinions. I feel like I am walking on egg shells* (community development worker, Broadmeadows Health Service).

Celebrations are also times when the social dynamics of families and communities are played out. As Friedman notes, they can

> focalise what has already been developing within the emotional system of the collective in that they bring people into conscious contact with one another and in that they bring processes to a head (1988, p. 435).

Anne Summers described how,

> Christmas was always a fraught affair for my family. Some of us always planned overseas travel to avoid the ordeal of the forced conviviality and the undercurrents of resentment that inevitably erupted, like Christmas sparkers (2005).

Several other people I spoke with expressed how they struggled with celebrations of different sorts. Each Christmas one friend rows a boat into the middle of the harbour and stays there for the day. Another friend sleeps through her birthdays and New Years Eve. Philip Adams wrote about his birthday in his regular column in *The Weekend Australian Magazine*.

> Many candles ago, gazing at the bloody birthday cake, I felt like Hamlet contemplating Yoricks's skull. Far from feeling happy, as the all-too-familiar chorus urged, I saw the 30-odd flames on the iced sponge as an imitation of mortality, a bonfire of the vanities which you're expected to extinguish with life's breath. It's as if that fatal cake and morbid ceremony moves you ever closer to your last breath - another bloody year up in bloody smoke (2006, p. 34).

Helen Razor, writer and former radio broadcaster wrote in *The Big Issue* magazine:

> I am always unravelled to ribbons by parties. They are culturally toxic, you never get enough to eat, and someone is nearly always unduly rude to you. I would almost rather have root canal work administered by a nervous intern who has been laying into the commemorative port all afternoon than go to another party… Since the launch of myself as a social being, parties have always proved disastrous (no date available).

Changes too in family dynamics such as divorce can disrupt family and community traditions which people can find difficult to deal with, and need to be re-negotiated and re-structured (Wolin and Bennet, 1984; Pett, Lang and Gander, 1992). Sometimes it is in the letting go of these expectations, especially negative ones, that people can fully be present and find healing and growth in actively participating in celebrations however they are. This was illustrated at a personal level by one participant who shared how it was not until she let go of her negative expectations about family gatherings and accepted them for what they were that she began to enjoy them.

The role of our personal perceptions and life circumstances as influencing our celebration experience is captured in the following extract of a biography by Ulla-Carin Lindquist who died soon after from motor neurone disease.

> Christmas is here, and a year ago when I got into a tangle and fumbled with the parcels, the spectre said that was my last Christmas.
> I was wrong.
> My daughters and sons are close by me. We know that this is for real now.
> Having them here, skin to skin, makes my joy so strong that I don't need to pretend to be merry.
> My four children, my husband, my mother-in-law, Mimmi, her son Hugo and I celebrate Christmas together. The table is extravagantly laden with pickled herring, ham, oven-baked potato-and-anchovy gratin, salmon, brown cabbage, red cabbage, greed cabbage, swede, sausages, meatballs, boiled dried fish, pancakes with saffron. "I can't understand how you can sit with us at the table when you can't taste a single crumb," says Mimmi.
> It might seem strange, but it doesn't bother me. I can taste the smells and remember my childhood's special occasion meals (2005).

Grimes comments on how

> births and initiations, like weddings and funerals, are moments of truth, but they are also moments of pretence, occasions upon which people put on their best faces. Scrubbed or painted faces can mask disagreements and power plays. Rites of passage can be rife with face-saving, posturing and empty decorum (2000, p. 10).

As someone who worked for five years in catering for weddings and other celebrations I would concur. Often what was happening 'out front' was different from the social drama that ensued behind the scenes in the kitchen. Such scenarios have provided great fodder for films and television programs.

A further challenge is that some celebrations deliberately seek to foster personal transformation but no support is provided after the event. This can leave the individual in varying degrees of distress as they attempt to integrate the changes stimulated by the celebrations.

> I am feeling very ungrounded, upset all the time. I don't know what to do.
> (participant, Fire Circle)

Further, acknowledging difficulties that might arise for the individual or the community can be beneficial. For example, one funeral celebrant I spoke with discussed how she may acknowledge that not everyone may have had a positive relationship with the person who had died. The deceased may have been violent or abusive throughout their life to others. She will state this rather than only saying 'nice' things about them. Not acknowledging this she believes can add to any trauma that has been experienced.

7.4.2 For communities

Tensions and misunderstandings about expectations and 'acceptable' ways of working were expressed by most of the community celebration organisers I spoke with. They could easily provide examples where conflict or disharmony occurred prior, during and even after the celebration. This sometimes occurred at a broader community level such as critiquing the purpose, form or values the festival represented or at quite personal levels such as critiquing festival organisers and their practices. For example, someone, often a person in power, might have become personally attached to a particular model and way of doing things. New ideas were resisted. There may be differing cross-cultural expectations about commitments, behaviour, communication and lack of clarity due to cultural or individual variation. There was often a need to clarify boundaries when individual needs conflicted with community needs.

Delemere's research in Canada found the negative aspects of community festivals for local residents included;

> amenity loss due to noise, litter and crowds; decreased access to public recreation and leisure facilities; changes in community social and leisure habits (eg people leaving the community to escape the impact of the festival); vandalism and hooliganism; and intergroup divisiveness arising from inequitable distribution of benefits and disadvantages (1997, p. 295-296).

Maureen Rogers and Yolande Collins in their research on Australian country towns found that communities that successfully develop a tourist trade can be "swamped with visitors who change, consciously and unconsciously, the style and feel of the host community" (2001, p. 16). Several practitioners I spoke with raised the question of the trade-off between economic gains and the wellbeing of the community. While local traders may get spin-offs from the influx of people is it worth it for the average resident - particularly when they volunteer. How meaningful is being a carpark attendant?

Amy Lawson reported while many local businesses appreciate the increased revenue generated by *Schoolies* week there were many reports in the media of local residents being distressed at "having to endure weeks of drunken revelry" (2004).

Activities such as alcohol consumption and eating to excess can lead to short term harm or reinforce ongoing lifestyle behaviours that contribute to ill health. For example, excessive alcohol consumption can lead to violence and injury, unsafe sex and, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Dietitians where I work at Prince of Wales Hospital give warnings to people about overindulgence during celebrations as health conditions such as diabetes and obesity can be exacerbated. Thackway, Delpech, Jorm, McAnulty and Visotina (2000) report how social interaction associated with mass gatherings can also lead to the spread of infectious diseases such as viruses and influenza, measles and gastroenteritis as well as injury through crowd crushes.

More recently the global discourse around terrorism has led to significant investment in risk management that has focused on security at public events, both large and small. Educational information about event safety is now widely available. For example, the NSW Police publishes a *Safe Party Pack* while the NSW Department of Education issues an *End of Year Celebrations Kit*. Arbon (2005) discusses medical coverage for mass gatherings and risk management and crowd safety in particular.

Other issues of importance are the impact of large gatherings of people on the natural and built environment as well as waste management. Research by Hamilton, Denniss and Baker (2005) found wasteful consumption in Australia exceeds $10.5 billion with a significant proportion occurs during the Christmas period. It was reported that it took 37 cleaners to remove the 29 tonnes of rubbish left by New Year's Eve revellers in the City of Sydney (Murphy, Glendinning and Frew, 2006). The Australian Broadcasting Commission stated over 1.5 million showbags were sold at the Sydney Easter show in 2006. In response the NSW state government has created an educational website to encourage responsible waste management practices (see www.wastewiseevents.resource.nsw.gov.au).

Discussion with people would suggest that it is useful to explore the celebration experience over time. People discussed changes that occurred in perceptions and attitudes, differing expectations, or a greater level of appreciation or judgment of others. This was in response to such things as changes in community dynamics – people leaving, introduction of new people or as relationships were built or damaged through supporting local community festivals and gatherings.

This chapter has examined how celebrations can negatively impact on the health of individuals and communities. It also presented ways they can be healing and support healthy development. The next chapter will describe and discuss how celebrations can provide meaningful experiences and how they can contribute to identity development.

Chapter 8: Celebrations, Meaning and Identity

> Wellbeing is happiness plus meaningfulness (Eckersley 2004, p. 97).

> …when we participate, help, contribute energy and talents, a festival can become meaningful in our lives (Cameron 1995, p. 144).

Community celebrations are usually undertaken for an explicit purpose. For example, to celebrate someone's 'birth' day, to commemorate a commitment between two people, a community holiday or a festive public gathering. Community celebrations such as local festivals however, often have implicit and explicit agendas. They are times when individuals and communities intentionally or unintentionally express their values, what they care about, where they have come from, where they are now and where they wish to go in the future.

A healthy community needs to reaffirm itself continuously and celebrations are one way this can be achieved. When studying local festivals in northern New South Wales, Ros Derret came to the conclusion that

> celebrations act as an 'elixir', which keeps community relevant and responsive to the needs of the times (2000, p. 124).

But it would be misleading to suggest that celebrations have deep meaning for all who participate and organise them. In the course of my research and experience I have met many people who participated out of a sense of obligation rather than purpose. And for some, celebration experiences are merely a time to *'get pissed with your mates'*.

8.1 Why is meaningfulness important?

Rachel Naomi Remin believes,

> Meaning is a human need. It strengthens us…It heals us by reminding us of our integrity, who we are, and what we stand for. It offers a place from which to meet the challenges of life (2005, p. 448).

Baumeister and Vohs (2002) assert the essence of meaning is connection. And they suggest meaning requires - purpose, values, efficacy and self-worth. Diener, Lucas and Oishi (2002) in reviewing research on happiness found that "the way people perceive the world is much more important to happiness than objective circumstances" (p. 68). Clive Hamilton in summarising much of the research in his book *Growth Fetish* concludes happiness is about inner contentment - "sitting easily with whom one is - rather than a state of more or less positive emotion" (2003, p. 49). Thus, meaning is achieved by how we engage in what is important to us. This would suggest we need spaces not to purchase goods as the media would lead us to believe but to reflect on what is meaningful and important. Jon Hawkes (2001) in his book, *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning* believes that the process of arriving at collective meanings is central to the health of a community and that governments should prioritise policies and programs that support this process. While the former Prime Minister of Australia, Paul Keating, at a presentation at the University of Technology Sydney in December 2000, said

> …nothing is more important to a country than the way it thinks of itself. In other words, the commonly shared model of what its national values and priorities are. Everything else, included economic growth, flows from that.

In his research on youth suicide Richard Eckersley came to the conclusion that

> 'Western culture' is failing to provide an adequate framework of hope, moral values, and a sense of belonging and meaning in our lives, so weakening social cohesion and personal resilience (in Spooner, Hall and Lynskey 2001, p. 13).

Thus, how celebrations can foster dialogue about and inner reflection, about what is meaningful and the meanings we place on our lives is a central tenant of this thesis.

8.2 Celebrations can foster meaning at an individual, organisational and community level

A covert or overt theme of all the government supported festivals and community celebrations I studied was strengthening a sense of identity and meaning both for the individual and the collective. Who are we, what do we bring to the overall community and what are our values? The community celebrations I studied were found to be meaningful at an individual, organisational and community level in the following ways.

Individual

1. Eliciting positive emotions such as enjoyment, pleasure, gratitude, pride and inspiration.
2. Fostering healing and personal development.
3. Providing connection to others and 'their' community.

Organisational

4. Generating a sense of pride and achievement.
5. Enabling people to take action on issues of concern.

Community

6. Providing a positive atmosphere and sense of vibrancy.
7. Fostering a sense of identity and creating or reinforcing guiding stories about 'our' community.

8.3 What is meaningful for one, may be less so for someone else

What is meaningful is culturally specific - be it personal, professional or social. As Corin notes,

> …culture is above all a system of meanings and symbols. This system shapes every area of life, defines a world-view that gives meaning to personal and collective experience, and frames the way people locate themselves within the world, perceive the world, and behave in it. Every aspect of reality is seen embedded within webs of meaning that define a certain world view that cannot be studied or understood apart from this collective frame (in Eckersley 2001, p. 55).

But the meaning that people attribute to a particular celebration is moderated to some degree by how much an activity draws on 'their' culture. This is summed up, perhaps a little cheekily by one Australian radio broadcaster I heard comparing the opening ceremony of the *2004 Athens Olympic Games* to that of the *2000 Sydney Olympic Games*, "opening ceremonies are a little like farts. We don't mind our own but can't stand anyone else's*"*.

The particular meanings people derive from celebrations is also illustrated by people in small Victorian towns who were critical of the format of local festivals. Several of the festivals, including the *Ouyen Rain-dance* and the annual *Art Is…* festival held in Horsham, led to a flurry of letters to the local editor from Christians within the community who were concerned about the festival themes and content. *Art Is…* is a two-week arts festival. Each year an overall theme is chosen. The 2003 *Art Is Freedom* festival focused on cultural diversity, refugees and migrant experiences. The festival director described how,

> *…in previous years we've been accused of satanic cult practices because of fire twirling.*
>
> *Letters debating religion continued for about eight weeks about having the monks involved.*

One of the organisers of the *Ouyen Rain-dance* said,

> *There were differences. There were pockets of the community that were wanting to obstruct the process. They saw that these women were doing something in league with the devil.*

CERES is a four-hectare park and education centre located in suburban Melbourne. Festivals are an integral feature of their education and community development programs. The *Harvest Festival* draws on traditional seasonal celebrations from across the world to bring people together to share their common relationship with food. But the original organiser of the festival reflected on how her interpretation of the corn dolly ritual which she facilitated every year was not always understood or shared by the diversity of people who participated in the festival

> *…the corn dolly ritual is incredibly meaningful for me but even speaking to one person who is uncomfortable with the pagan roots makes me think again about it. …That is why in the last two years I have spent time developing the corn dolly pantomime to highlight the inherent humanness, humour and ecology around that story to make it more friendly and to decode it - to make it less esoteric* (former organiser, CERES Autumn Harvest Festival).

8.4 Accentuating the positive

> There is so much that casts down and so little that uplifts and inspires (Thurman in Fox, 2000).

Francois Matarasso (1997) found the arts made a contribution to self-reported levels of happiness and wellbeing. Susan Ball and Clare Keating (2004) in their evaluation of the VicHealth community arts funding scheme commented on the way grassroots arts activities create joy.

Bill Berkowitz advocates that it is important to "find ways to transcend the ordinary, to conduct activities that are unusual, surprising, spirited and joyful" (2001) and proposes that celebratory neighbourhood events can do this by supplementing existing traditions, rituals or activities and stimulating them if they do not exist.

Research on 'happiness' undertaken predominantly in the USA and about 'wellbeing' that is emerging from the United Kingdom and Australia has reinforced the obvious, that positive experiences are good for us mentally, socially and physiologically. Martin Seligman who coined the term 'positive psychology' believes that,

> the pleasant life is about maximising one's good feelings about the past (through gratitude and forgiveness), about the present (through savoring and mindfulness), and about the future (through optimism and hope); the good life is about cultivating the strengths and virtues; and the meaningful life is about applying these strengths and virtues in the service of something larger than oneself. The full life - is a life that integrates the pleasant, good, and meaningful life (in Pawelski and Prilleltensky, forthcoming).

How we approach life is important to our health. Herbalist and ceremonialist Elchai said:

> My goal is to celebrate the normal, the ordinary and the everyday events with ceremony, because in fact, your whole life is one magnificent ceremony, one long dramatic myth with you as its central character (in Farmer 2002, p. 25).

McCubbin and McCubbin found "celebrations punctuate and highlight the uniqueness in family life" (1988, p. 247). Celebrations allow the ordinary to become extraordinary and special. Dorothy McRae-McMahon (2005b) commented during a panel discussion on spirituality at Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney, they *"make an ordinary persons journey significant and worthy of incorporation into the wider community and of existence"*. They acknowledge 'that you matter.' Ruth Ostrow wrote in *The Weekend Australian*

> We should all learn how to praise, and be praised…The magical transformation that occurs when we honour someone or are honoured in return, is indescribable. Most of us go through life without ever saying the things we should be saying to those around us who support us, nurture us, and provide a stunning role model (2004, p. 23).

Accentuating the positive, of course, is opposite to a deficit approach to community development and health promotion where the focus is on identifying problems. Such an approach often reinforces negative beliefs about a community. As Pawelski and Prilleltensky recognise, "both the reduction of deficits and the cultivation of strengths are essential for human flourishing" (forthcoming).

Celebrations are one way to cultivate strengths. An example is the *Imagine Chicago* initiative which brings people together to talk and listen, to work together, to draw on local assets in creating the community they aspire to. The technique they adopt is appreciative inquiry which involves gathering positive stories and images and construction of positive interactions.

> It seeks out the very best of what is to help ignite the collective imagination of what could be. The aim is to generate new knowledge that expands the realm of the possible. It helps members of an organisation or community envisage a collectively desired future and work together to create it (Verrinder 2005, p. 254).

The evaluation of *Celebrate WA 2000* (Government of Western Australia) which modelled itself on the Imagine Chicago approach reported positive outcomes, including:

- fostering active and responsible citizenship through community involvement;
- highlighting and recording the best of what was, and is, in communities and used these to move the community forward;
- promoting a positive self-and community image which highlighted the value, potential, place and contribution of each person in their community; and
- providing a framework for sustaining a positive shared future for Western Australian communities.

Thus, by their very nature celebrations have the potential to contribute to 'a well rounded life' in that they are or at least should be, positive, strengths based activities.

8.5 Celebrations create meaning

The potential of celebrations in providing meaningful experiences can be demonstrated by the *Ouyen Rain-dance*. There were a number of factors that led to this celebration being particularly meaningful for the community. One, it was an inclusive festival with something for various parts of the community. While the women were at the rain-dance a treasure hunt was held for children, and concerts were held for young people and other adults of the community. It was free to attend and received wide-scale support from sponsors and attracted high profile performers. Two, the women's only rain-dance required the women to be naked (or in a sarong). As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, to dance naked with 550 other women was a personal achievement for many women. The rain-dance became 'a sacred space' which was facilitated by an experienced facilitator of rituals. The local men played a role by protecting the perimeters of the property from media intrusion. Three, the *Ouyen Rain-dance* attracted international media attention. It put the small Ouyen community of 400 people on the map. Finally, it built the local capacity to work together to achieve community goals. The *Ouyen Rain-dance* only took eight weeks to organise.

> *…lifted the spirits of the community…Coming together to create something always brings good energy* (ritual facilitator, Ouyen Rain-dance).

> *..it showered us with so many gifts, goodwill, happiness, humour, connectiveness* (resident and organiser, Ouyen Rain-dance).

> *It was a really amazing experience…I have learnt that females are amazing people. No matter what hardships are going on they always find a way to support each other* (participant, Ouyen Rain-dance).

Coming together collectively to celebrate community appeared to have an important symbolic meaning for communities who had faced difficult times such as drought and bushfires. It was seen by community observers as a statement of resilience, resourcefulness and provided an opportunity to have control over a particular aspect

of life. It also provided an opportunity to release tension. The rain-dance facilitator said,

> *We wanted to do something to alleviate the drought. There was a feeling of helplessness and this was something they could do*.

The Dunnolly *Heart and Soul*[13] celebration was part of a series of small (few hundred people) town festivals supported in the Maryborough region of Victoria. These festivals were part of Connecting Confident Communities a broader community building program supported by the Victorian government. This festival aimed to get people actively involved in the Dunnolly community which through economic decline had lost many public services and shops. The afternoon celebrations provided opportunity for local groups to showcase themselves. It included a free barbeque and arts activities. For one participant being able to 'celebrate' their unique town was meaningful. *"Our community is the luckiest one today"*.

While many celebrations may share similar elements no two celebrations I have attended have been exactly the same. People tend to tailor celebrations to give them their own meaning and significance and based on their capacity be it logistical, financial or understanding of celebration practice.

For some it is traditions that people find reassuring. This is evident in traditional religious and cultural celebrations, ceremonies and rituals. It was also evident in the community based celebrations I examined in Victoria. For example, knowing that a community celebration is going to be held on an annual basis was appreciated by participants in the *CERES Autumn Harvest Festival.*

> *You get more from the festival each time…another dimension is revealed* (volunteer, CERES Autumn Harvest Festival).

> *…provides continuity when world is in change…I know this happens this time of year …and this is the way it works* (event manager, CERES).

[13] See brief description in appendix one under the title pARTy in the Parks.

I spoke with many people at the *Woodford Folk Festival* who have made the festival an annual pilgrimage. It provides them with the opportunity to reconnect with their friends and be in community, one that resonates with their values.

> …it's the only festival that has made me feel special. It's a gathering of spirits, the annual roundup of dear friends - the highlight of the year (volunteer reported in Cameron 1993, p. 116).

For one environmentalist this was essential for him in being able to sustain his work during the rest of the year.

8.6 Sense of pride

The role of the arts and events in generating community pride is well recognised (Ball and Keating, 2004; Molloy, 2002). A sense of pride about what had been achieved resonated through many interviews I conducted with celebration participants. For example, the *Nati Frinj Festival*[14] was held in Natimuk a small drought affected rural town west of Horsham. Nati Frinj was a two and a half day community arts festival that included a street parade, film festival, exhibitions and music performances. The major feature was the *Space and Place* performance that revolved around the local silos and involved an interactive animation, an aerial performance, sculptures, community choir, shadow movement and performances by young people. These were some of the comments made about the performance by local people.

> *Challenge the notion of small towns being small and insignificant.*
>
> *…makes me feel proud.*
>
> *Very, very good and very professional.*

[14] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

Last night was world class and it was here in Natimuk. Pretty cool.

In Melbourne go and see that - yeah it was great.

Some were a little sceptical …thought it might be a dud …I wish they were here.

A sense of pride was also generated by the *Ouyen Rain-dance*. The women I spoke with were also proud of how the men in the community supported them. The facilitator of the Ouyen Rain-dance had this to say:

Men were amazing, so supportive. To take a certain pride in their women doing this. And their protective aspect - protecting us from the media.

8.7 Identity

Identity comes from positioning ourselves in relation to the whole. It is something that is constantly (re)negotiated. Celebrations can make a contribution to local image and identity development. Like other cultural exchanges, celebrations can shape and be shaped by how an individual or community views itself and others. When examining arts based projects, Thomas and Rappaport argued they provide a way to gauge a community's experiences and to participate in the making of "their own history, their own future, and their own identity" (1996, p. 326).

McLeod, Pryor and Meade (2004) found that the arts can symbolise and express diverse experiences within a single form and create a sense of identity for whole communities. As mentioned already, rituals have long been used to convey or reinforce identity or status and acceptance within a particular community. Michelle Hall from the NSW Local Government Association said:

> *… celebrating is extremely important to local government as it contributes to community ownership and wellbeing which results in safer and more cohesive communities who are proud of their identity.*

As one Aboriginal worker at Broadmeadows Technical and Further Education College said about *NAIDOC*[15] week and *Survival Day*,

> *… these days are important for Aboriginal people who are searching for their own identity - sense of belonging.*

Colson (in Luboshitzky and Gaber, 2001) suggests that celebrating personal holidays, such as birthdays, may help clients to assert their personalities and to enhance their sense of self-identity. The *Where the Heart Is* festival provided a space for homeless people to identify with others like themselves and showcase their musical and artistic talents. A lifestyles tent offered them opportunities to have a haircut, massage and have their photo taken. A free lunch was provided. The health workers who organised the festival noted the following:

> *A day like this gives them respect, dignity and it is fun.*

> *When we gave people their photo they would carry them around close to their chest and show everyone.*

> *Weeks later people are still showing me their photos. They love their photos. They had no current one….For some they had lost their personal identity…I often go to where people are staying and see the photos taking pride of place.*

In a chapter five I suggested that, The *Sydney Mardi Gras* provided a forum for sexual identity to be explored and renegotiated. Initially it gave visibility to the gay and lesbian community. Continuing dialogue and debate over the years, much of it in within the community, has focused on who should be included in the *Sydney Mardi*

[15] NAIDOC stands for National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee which celebrates the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Gras and has led to redefining the boundaries of this community. Helen Razor (2004) commenting on the *Sydney Mardi Gras* said, [now]

> …younger people tend to view sexuality as a continuum rather than a destiny, queer playfully damages our most fundamental ideas about identity. Almost impossible to define, queer signifies any 'other' sexuality, whether or not it is lived. Privileging diversity over otherness, queer can mean everything, including Carson.

8.8 From the shallows to the depths

> Because life is so short its invitations so thrilling, it is such a waste to become absent from life (O'Donohue 2003, p. 188).

How we celebrate tells us a lot about who we are and the 'depths' to which we go. Celebrations are often viewed as hedonistic and frivolous (Gately, 2004). While some focus primarily on play and are not consciously planned or enacted, others certainly are. Even a birthday beer with mates at the pub lets someone know they are socially connected. However, celebrations can focus our attention in such ways, particularly through the use of ceremony and ritual, to engage in a deeper connection with the present moment and our senses and aliveness. This enables a greater degree of what Buddhists refer to as 'mindfulness'. The value of mindfulness to positive wellbeing is now well recognised. Langer (2002) found it enables one to stay engaged and situated in the present. This enables the individual to make positive choices, increases performance and leads to enjoyable learning experiences. The degree of personal consciousness one has will influence how transformative a particular celebration process is. Although having said this, sometimes people are taken along by the group consciousness that can arise.

> *What surprised me, as a bit of a cynical, hippie hating, crystal sceptic, was the community bonding and generating of hope which the event inspired* (comment reported in final report, Ouyen Rain-dance).

Those activities incorporated into community celebrations that involved people collaboratively creating something were well received and for many were more personally meaningful. I spoke with several people at the *Woodford Folk Festival* who said how important it was that they volunteer each time they came. This reflected my own experience of celebrations. Those which I have found rewarding and meaningful were those that provided a safe space for me to collaboratively create the celebration with others. My sister's wedding was one such experience. I, along with several friends, helped organise the wedding according to her and her partners wishes. We had a busy but enjoyable time adding lots of special touches that were symbolic of their journey together.

Celebrations can be valuable when they enable a shift from a superficial to a more 'conscious' awareness. This consciousness can be viewed as a dimension of deep connectedness. In the final chapter I present a diagrammatic model to try and depict this. The next chapter will explore the ways that celebrations can foster connectedness, an essential component of wellbeing.

Chapter 9: Fostering Connectedness through Celebration

> It is truly the pattern that connects. It provides communication at all levels - communication among all the systems within the individual human organism; between people within groups; between one group and another in a city and throughout all these levels between the human and the non-human in the natural environment (LaChapelle in discussing ritual 1984, p. 5).

All people share the experience of journeying through life, from birth to death. People have the need to feel valued and connected - to the different aspects of ourselves and that which is beyond self. But it is not hard to find stories and commentaries in the popular press about how fragmented and disconnected we all are, from ourselves, and the world around us - family, community, ancestors, places where we live, the earth and spirit. Celebrations can create patterns of intersection between our individual, social, physical and spiritual selves.

The power of celebration and ritual to (re)awaken community consciousness about these relationships is well recognised by indigenous and religious commentators. As African spiritual teacher Malidoma said:

> It is in community that rituals of birth and marriage, rites of passage and death are remembered and practiced. These rituals make us worthy and ready to join the greater community of creation itself. They connect the inner community with the outer community, the microcosm with the macrocosm. They also allow the community as a single organism to wake up, stretch, connect, celebrate, let go, heal, grieve, forgive, remember. Just as there is no community without ritual, so there is no ritual without community (in Mathew Fox 2000, p. 72).

This chapter will explore the connections fostered by celebrations with others, the earth and spirit.

9.1 Bringing people together

> *I come for the experience of community* (participant, Woodford Folk Festival).

At one level celebrations can simply be a social occasion where people can meet, where they can renew or further develop these relationships. For most of us our world is a social world and coming to understand ourselves in relation to other people is our primary source of connection. The importance of social interactions to mental health and wellbeing to the health of individuals and communities is well documented (for example, see VicHealth, 2005a; Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003).

The importance of social contact is poignantly told in a personal account by a homeless person in the *Big Issue* magazine.

> My worst birthday was when people didn't want to know me - when I didn't get a birthday card or present or anything. This year I bought myself a mobile phone for my birthday. This means people can keep in touch with me (Hall, no date available).

At the 2002 forum I convened on *Celebrations for Development and Change*, Michelle Hall from the NSW Local Government Association stated:

> *In this day and age of increasing work and family demands, the opportunity to interact with neighbours and people within your community is extremely limited. Also the stresses placed upon one's life, inhibits effective social interaction. Celebrations allow people to become a participant within their community simply by attending and immersing themselves into what should be an unique experience.*

While there are other significant gatherings such as being in a crowd watching a sporting match or when communities come together to combat bushfires, what is unique about celebrations, is that they do not focus on being competitive as does sport or combating difficult situations such as dealing with a bushfire but rather have a positive intention.

Celebration as a collective social activity can occur at a personal, family, tribal, group or public, and societal level. The collective dimension may come about because of shared geography, relationships, culture, interests and experiences; or by a group or groups engaging in political action or social change.

The potential for community celebrations to 'bring people together' is noted by research undertaken within the tourism sector (McQueen-Thomson, James and Ziguras, 2004). One of the major conclusions of Deidre Williams in her 1996 study of the long-term benefits of community-based arts funding in Australia was that the projects it supported reduced social isolation in the community. The evaluation of the *VicHealth Community Arts Participation Scheme* discussed by Ball and Keating (2002) also highlighted the role of the arts in supporting people to make friends and, developing and extending social skills. However, there is little research about the nature and quality of the social interactions that occur in celebrations and community arts projects. Or about what type of activities and practices generate these outcomes.

Informal and intentional interactions can help people get to know each other, and repeated interactions develop into ongoing social networks. All the community celebrations examined in this research clearly demonstrated their ability to mobilise people to work together and to 'come along' either as active participants or observers. Statistics highlighting the extent of celebration activity in Australia were presented in chapter one. While large festivals such as the *Woodford Folk Festival* that draws 130,000 people, the small to medium festivals examined in Victoria brought together smaller but proportionally significant numbers. The *Ouyen Rain-dance*, a small rural community of 1,200 brought together 4,000 people from across the region and state for the family day and 500 people for the rain-dance. Despite soaring temperatures over 40° celsius, the *Where the Heart Is* festival brought together 500 homeless people in Melbourne. Over 400 of 700 local residents attended the *Dunnolly Heart and Soul* celebration. Over 300 people came to the *Turkish Celebration Day* at the Broadmeadows Health Service. The *Berringama Lucyvale Wabba Bash* brought 80% of the local community together. As one Horsham resident stated, the *Art Is…* festival acts as a *"…catalyst to bring together a lot of people who lie dormant and separate."*

One volunteer in Dunnolly expressed her surprise that, *"No-one had ever actually seen so much of our town in one place at one time."*

The 2006 *Perth International Arts Festival* invited the Nyoongar community to share with non-Aboriginal West Australians the Nyoongar language, fire rituals, song cycles and art. Victoria Laurie, reported one elderly man as saying, "I have never seen so many Nyoongars in one place before. Usually we only meet like this for funerals" (2006).

The celebrations I examined demonstrated their ability to bring people together also at an *individual level* where new friends were made:

> *Now after the Kneading Bread performance I have new friends from diverse cultures - my new friend from Kenya, she saw me dancing the Salsa as part of the performance and so now she has asked me if I would teach her. We have a connection now* (educator, CERES).

> *Some of the women have found other ways to keep connecting in that way* (ritual facilitator, Ouyen Rain-dance).

Social interaction also occurred in and around planned activities. People had positive interactions in structured workshops or while participating in informal activities such as dancing or singing. The *One Voice* project in *Art Is…* combined ages, abilities and backgrounds from people fourteen years of age to those in their seventies, floral artists and singers from different churches. People valued the opportunity to catch up with old friends. Such opportunities help keep these connections strong and binding.

> *It acted as a big reunion for the community and its extended networks* (organiser and participant, Ouyen).

> *I catch up with friends. Sometimes this is the only time we catch up during the year* (artist and participant, Woodford Folk Festival).

Also, the preparation phase can provide social opportunities. The director of *Art Is…* found

> *The Koori community treated the rehearsals as a social event. Families would come along with food. After the event we also had a BBQ.*

People also came together at an *organisational* level. For example, the *CERES Autumn Harvest Festival* and *Celebrating Difference*[16] at Broadmeadows Health Service fostered links between ethnic community organisations. One community representative in Horsham noted:

> *All organisations pull together…to assist with the functions. Community organising like this doesn't happen at other times...*

At the *community level* there were opportunities to come together for 'whole of community' activities such as a performance. These led to active involvement for a small number of people and passive involvement for a much larger group.

> *It's one of the few times during the year that you will get such a mix of people from the community together, age-wise, you know, performers, non-performers, farmers, professionals, etc, all together* (resident and director, Nati Frinj festival).

> *It brings community together. Farmers and others were involved. You know, they were behind the scenes helping with equipment. And there were older and newer artists in the community working together* (resident, Natimuk).

But having said all this, not all festivals consciously bring people together collectively in ways that enable people to identify themselves as part of a broader community but instead they plan and organise entertainment activities where people are engaged as individuals and only in a passive manner. The *Woodford Folk Festival* is an example

[16] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

of a festival that consciously sought to bring the 'whole of community together'. The organisers did so in ways that enabled passive participation in the opening and closing ceremonies - and active participation with simple and accessible rituals. The rituals were also designed to give the participants a feeling of being part of a broader community. I will describe and discuss the *Woodford Folk Festival* later on.

In the Victorian festivals I studied people came together, not only as performers and participants but also as part of organising groups. The planning phase of community celebrations typically involved sustained and intense involvement of paid workers and volunteers. The preparation phase may have included workshops or other lead-up activities such as rehearsals or arts activities. There was typically a division of labour between a co-ordinating group and volunteers who would help with the logistical tasks, catering and cleaning up on the day. For people who 'attended' there would be varying degrees of participation ranging from watching performances, looking around at displays, meeting and sharing time with others, eating, to participating in workshops and activities. At times organisers, volunteers, artists and participants intersected. After the celebration a smaller group would clear up, more often than not, the original co-ordinating group who were the people most likely to stop and consciously reflect on what occurred and complete any final tasks such as administrative requirements associated with grant acquittals.

9.2 Sense of belonging

Jon Hawkes argues that "carefully planned cultural action is essential for the achievement of sustainability and wellbeing" (2001, p. 2) and cultural interaction is a key process for individuals to understand, respect and trust one another, leading to community cohesion. Celebrations can be seen as an example of the type of cultural action and arts practice Hawkes calls for more of. The value of community celebrations as a shared purposeful activity that creates community has been noted by Robert Bush, Jo Dower and Allyson Mutch (2002) in their research about developing healthy communities. Anthropologists Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff (1977) and Victor Turner suggest that the symbolic function of rituals fosters a sense of

belonging to a group. Turner described and discussed the role of celebration, ceremony and ritual in fostering solidarity (community) which he termed 'communitas'. Turner identified three types of communitas:

1. existential or spontaneous (outflowing of warmth for others in the group);
2. normative (organised into a social system); and
3. ideological (utopian) (1969, p. 132).

He also distinguished between genuine and non-genuine types of communitas. My observation would suggest that all these forms of communitas can be present within a single celebration. The particular type of communitas is influenced by the context and the processes adopted. As will be discussed further in chapter 14 there is contestation about what makes a celebration authentic or genuine with many contemporary celebrations being criticised for being inauthentic or as Turner would term them non-genuine.

A similar concept to communitas has been put forward by community psychologists and termed a 'sense of belonging'. McMillan and Chavis, for example, state that a sense of belonging and identification involves "the feeling, belief and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group and a willingness to sacrifice for the group" (1986, p. 10). John O'Donohue, a theologian, believes a sense of belonging is empowering.

> When your way of belonging in the world is truthful to your nature and your dreams, your heart finds contentment and your soul finds stillness. You are able to participate fully in the joy and adventure of exploration and your life opens up for living, joyfully, powerfully and tenderly. Conversely, when you are excluded or rejected, your life inevitably tends to narrow into a concern, and sometimes an obsession, with that exclusion and the attempt to change it (1998, p. 6-7).

Wilkinson and Marmot (2003) argue that "belonging to a social network of communication and mutual obligation makes people feel cared for, loved, esteemed and valued. This has a powerful protective effect on health" (p. 22). People involved in the Victorian celebrations I studied spoke about the sense of belonging they experienced.

> *One of the greatest outcomes of the festival is the sense that where we live is a unique area, that the geographical and cultural features of our community are worthy of celebration* (funding application, Art Is…).

> …*good feeling of community* (participant, CERES Autumn Harvest Festival).

> *It changed the level of caring. There is now camaraderie* (organiser, Ouyen Rain-dance).

> *I feel at home, I feel I belong* (performer, CERES Autumn Harvest Festival).

> *I haven't been at CERES for long - my sense of belonging to CERES increased a lot after the festival. At the festival I got to meet lots of people and feel happier working here* (cultural teacher, CERES).

> *I actually do feel part of community when the festival is on* (resident and artist, Horsham).

> *I think one of the big things is that they start to see themselves as a bigger community* (artist, Atherton Fringe Feast).

Communities are never static or complete. Cheryl Walter recognises a community as

> emergent in that it is continually being created and re-created, its parameters and relationships taking shape and changing shape, through the actions and interactions of people and organisations (1997, p. 71).

Celebrations can help a community to continually (re)define itself and allow for its further development by fostering shared values, shared memories, common stories, myths and histories.

> Festivals can provide the heart to a community as they provide conditions of freedom and connectedness rather than a fixation on the forms and structures of the community (Derret, 2003, p. 39)

Celebrations that can do this can embed community within the context of the human journey, both past and future. Several community celebrations I participated in assisted longstanding residents to consider the changes brought about by newer residents, and for newer residents to recognise long standing local assets and resources. For example, people new to the local community told how the *CERES Autumn Harvest Festival* made them feel welcome.

> *Great, inclusive atmosphere, welcoming* (participant).

> *Felt welcomed and respected* (participant on temporary protection visa).

> *I think the festival is important for people suffering hardship and loneliness because events like this help welcome them - it is simple hospitality. We all share this land - the least we can do is be hospitable to each other and to the land. It is a small step, a drop in the ocean* (participant on temporary protection visa).

> *At CERES the people are very welcoming, there are lots of smiles even if they can't speak much (because of the language barrier). And this leads to trust and openness in the women* (social worker, community health).

> *They felt that CERES wants us, they see that they are not treated differently, they learn to see that they are welcome. Many people who speak to them at the festival say that they don't approve of the government's actions. When the women stay at home they are not exposed to these attitudes. So it is very important to them. They feel now that Australia is now their land, their second home, and they want to protect it* (cultural teacher, CERES).

For others it was connecting with like-minded people they valued - finding one's tribe so to speak.

9.3 Social capital

> For community to exist, there must be relationships between the people and organisations in these horizontal and vertical dimensions. These relationships involve actions and consciousness, which can be conceived of as dimensions of community as well (Walter 1997, p. 71).

I am aware that it would be possible to use social capital as an over-arching concept that embraces other concepts I have used in this chapter as sub-headings - bringing people together, sense of belonging and social inclusion. But I prefer to use connectedness as the overarching concept. For the purpose of this chapter and my definition of social capital I will focus on relationship building.

People I interviewed commented,

> *Everything is about relationships….if you got them everything will work out. If you don't, things will be difficult - and you won't know where to go* (organiser, Celebrating Carisbrook).

> *I know what to expect and I've established much stronger connections with community* (director, Art Is…).

> *Through planning we get so much more than the celebration. We get networks and build trust* (community development worker, Broadmeadows Health Service).

McQueen-Thomason, James and Ziguras assert "…that festivals are foundational to tribal and traditional societies, and continue to carry a weighty integrational role in modern societies" (2004, p. 14). The notion of integration alludes to social capital.

The value of festivals and celebrations has been acknowledged by Robert Putnam (2000) in his work on social capital. He observed that they can be an effective way of bringing residents together, promoting community life and strengthening local community connections through processes that build social capital, improve social

cohesion and contribute to the building of communities. Social capital is an important concept because it sees the very act of creating spaces in which people can interact, socialise and plan action as health promoting in and of itself. Rychetik and Todd (2004) refer to three types of social capital:

1. Bonding - through which individuals have access to *personal support*,
2. Bridging - through which individuals engage with *wider networks of people*; and
3. Linking - through which organisations can build *partnerships*.

Sport provides an interesting example of bonding and bridging. Bonding occurs within each team and even across teams when competing against other states or codes. The following commentary on the winning of the America's cup in 1983 by historian Donald Horne illustrates the bonding potential of celebrations at its simplest.

> More breakfast champagne went down honest Australian throats on October 6, 1983 than was usual in a whole year. That was the morning 'Bondie' won the America's Cup. Cars raced along suburban streets bearing young Aussies screaming victory and waving flags of boxing kangaroos; 'Hawkie', as prime minister, said in the morning that a boss who sacked anyone for not turning up that day was a bum; and in the evening that the nation had been brought together. This was a shining example of how a celebration is a kind of magic interlude in which people feel they are one because they are pulling for one special value (2002, p. 2).

In the community celebrations I examined social bonding occurred, particularly with the organising groups.

> *…we had a nice tight unit up there working on the festival, and I didn't really know those people well when I first arrived* (cultural teacher, CERES).

> *It was good to witness people who hadn't worked together before. Even though we are a small community and, didn't know them well before* (resident and organiser, Ouyen Rain-dance).

Moriaty and Wagner suggest that rituals are one "index of family collaboration, accommodation, and synergy" (2004, p. 207). Graham Meltzer (2005) in his review of intentional communities[17] around the world identified that those with the most cohesive social relationships actively used festive celebration and cultural expression to build a common identity and connectedness within the community. Over time, they developed their own symbols and traditions.

But not all aspects of social capital are health enhancing. Putnam (2000) warns of the problems of focusing on bonding at the expense of bridging. As do Evans and Prilliltensky who note that:

> While [a] sense of cohesion is a desirable quality in communities, it often breeds exclusion. When exclusion is combined with intolerance, dangerous outcomes are possible, as in discrimination, oppression, exploitation and extermination (forthcoming).

Celebrations are more often than not the site where bonding and bridging is contested. Etzioni commented on the contestation about holiday festivities, nothing that some strengthen communal bonds while others may undermine societal integration. He further qualifies this by adding that a contested holiday "may serve as a societal process that helps work through conflicts among the member units and the society at large" (2000, p. 57). An example that illustrates this contestation is Australia Day. It is a national holiday to commemorate the founding of the first British colony. It has moved from representing only white Anglo Saxon colonialist achievements towards representing a more multi-cultural Australia. But it remains a site of contestation, particularly for Aboriginal Australians who as I have mentioned call it *Survival* or *Invasion Day*.

In some instances community celebrations in Victoria were used to support groups of people to create a new and common identity. Some groups did not necessarily identify as being members of the same community but could identify common

[17] An intentional community is a group of mostly unrelated people living together and dedicated by intent to specific common values or goals. Intentional communities generally place a high value on the sharing of land, housing, buildings and facilities. Shared facilities symbolise communal values and goals, and serve to represent the group as a collective (Meltzer 2005, p. 2).

experiences such as refugee migration. In doing so, they illustrated the ability of community celebrations to build bridging social capital.

Graeme Dunstan an experienced festival organiser suggests festivals are times where

> people reach out from their usual routines and interests, go beyond themselves for the community good. The preparation for, and production of, a festival causes people to cross social boundaries and interact in different ways (in Derret, 2000).

The multimedia performance that was created for the *Nati Frinj* festival is an illustrative example of this. It was a collaborative production of local Koori community members, artists, rock climbers, local firemen, community elders, local businesses and community organisations such as the Lions Club and the Hospital fundraising committee, school children and the all ages choir. It acted as a vehicle for creating bridges between community groups who do not always identify as belonging to the same community.

> *That's where you see people build confidence and networks together. It is like the festival this year. A choir project. This is a conservative, fundamentalist, religious community. I saw that group of people, Natimuk, rock climbers working together. They would never have another means of connecting together. They talk to each other on the streets now* (community worker, Horsham).

VicHealth (2003b) makes a distinction between the different types of relationships. They can be distinguished on a continuum from networking through to collaboration. The strongest relationships are at the collaboration end of the continuum.

1. *Networking* involves the exchange of information for mutual benefit. This type of relationship does not require a lot of time nor high levels of trust.
2. *Co-ordinating* involves exchanging information and altering activities for a common purpose.

3. *Co-operating* involves exchanging information, altering activities and sharing resources. It requires a significant amount of time, high level of trust between partners and sharing turf between agencies.
4. *Collaborating* includes the above activities and enhancing the capacity of the other partner for mutual benefit and a common purpose.

The Victorian community celebrations demonstrated their ability to generate and reinforce networks and, co-ordination and co-operative partnerships. But only a few adopted a more collaborative approach.

An illustration of *networking* can be seen in the relationship that was developed between the new asylum seekers and those with Temporary Protection Visas and several community organisations as part of the *Cooking Stories* project. All groups were introduced to the Asylum Seekers Welcome Centre in Brunswick. Some of the community workers for the participating groups developed relationships and have since worked together on other festivals and community activities. The Afar community was introduced to Footscray Community Arts Centre and decided to have their festival at that venue. As a result of the profile gained from the *Cooking Stories* project the Afar community share an office with other members of the African community in Footscray. Several Afghani women also subsequently joined a cultural catering business.

Moving along the continuum to relationships that are characterised by co-ordination, the range of activities involved in the *Nati Frinj* festival required several agencies to *co-ordinate* activities to create a common program including the Lutheran Church, Country Women's Association, the local art and craft shop, the Historical Society, Red Cross, Natimuk Bush Hospital appeal, Tennis Club, Football club and Natimuk Kinder.

Co-operation was demonstrated between agencies and artists to produce exhibitions and by different agencies such as the Lions Club and the Nati Hall committee, in managing the events. The director of *Art Is…* in Horsham explained how:

> The *Art Is… One Voice* singing project created *"strong relationships with HRCC, media, University, local schools, University of the Third Age, HUB, the arts community, Wesley PAC, Goolum Goolum, Werrimul, the tourism centre, Natimuk climbing community and Nexus"* (director, Art Is…Horsham).

Interviews with health workers and community representatives about the *Broadmeadows Celebrating Difference* activities suggest that the process of representing an ethnically defined community to the broader community also facilitated co-operation between leaders within different organisations from the same cultural groups. Relationships that were established with key leaders within these communities benefited future activities.

Moving further along the continuum, *co-operation* and *collaboration* was exhibited between the *Art Is…* festival and *Nati Frinj* festival in enabling the Nati Frinj festival to become a stand alone event and between artists and organisations in the creation of the *Space and Place* performance.

There were cases of where involvement in a particular community celebration developed relationships that could be drawn upon for other community activities.

> *…we did draw on the experience of an artist involved in another VicHealth project…we used her knowledge base about how to do events. She was happy to help. Her involvement in this helped her other role as an artist on that project…she got better results, people were more comfortable with her and her project* (organiser, Celebrating Carisbrook).

The *Flying Feathers Festival*[18] held in Eurora which focused on young people had benefits for the events organiser in her role as community worker and it also enhanced her relationship with the local high school.

[18] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

Several organising groups actively sought to build relationships with individuals, groups and organisations with each new celebration cycle. For example, *Thong on the Roof*[19] started with the young people involved in Lead On, a youth mentoring initiative, but the next year moved to more marginalised young people such as the local Aboriginal community. And at CERES,

> *It was fantastic to have new groups involved this year such as the East Timorese community from the Red Cross Asylum Seekers program and the North Yarra Vietnamese community. We made connections with new cultural cooks from Brazil, El Salvador, India, Japan and Italy* (report, CERES Autumn Harvest Festival).

The *Where the Heart Is* community celebration drew on existing relationships. An evaluation report stated:

> *A strong advantage has been that the existing networks within the health and housing sectors are well established and these were the networks which activated so successfully in a relatively short time to form the collaborations required to organise the festival. The workers and agencies are practiced at responding immediately and practically to challenges and opportunities and this was evidenced in their participation and the contributions of funding and goods* (Royal District Nursing Services 2004, p. 6).

But it also built, and reinforced, relationships between colleagues working within the Royal District Nursing Service and other agencies. Different agencies took responsibility for different areas of activity and co-operated in managing the festival. The festival provided a common activity to work on.

> *It captured imagination and struck a chord with service providers and others.*
>
> *It gave us a common focus across positions.*

[19] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

It brought about team building within the homeless persons' team and the broader housing sector. So next time we hope to have greater structure, and to draw in others.

Increasing numbers would show up to the planning meetings. Usually they drop off. People were committed to the idea and the activities.

The festival also re-defined the relationships, at least temporarily, between health workers and their clients. Social interaction between health workers and homeless persons is often limited to interactions at the place of emergency accommodation, meals programs and through contact with health and welfare agencies. As several health workers and volunteers stated:

…it built connections with clients, amongst ourselves…being people.

…it is not just about finding a bed…it is creative output. There was more participation and of an artistic type rather than speaking about housing.

We could see workers and clients engaging. This changes the relationship between worker and clients. They are equal…alongside each other.

It was good for both the clients and agencies as they were on the same level.

9.4 Social inclusion

A socially inclusive society is one where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity. Social exclusion is the process of being shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural systems which contribute to the integration of a person into the community (Cappo, in VicHealth 2005b, p. 1).

Opportunities for social connection do not directly lead to health benefits. "A person can feel isolated even when they are in a crowd. Both the opportunity and quality of contact are important" (Hassed in Streker 2002, p. 22).

Kawachi and Berkman found that the benefits and costs of social interaction are influenced by gender, socio-economic position and stage in life (in Rychetnik and Todd 2004, p. 23). Community celebrations can reinforce, for some, a sense of isolation. This, in part, can be due to not identifying with the celebration or seeing their experiences reflected or voices heard. For example, adult 'voices' and interests can easily dominate and exclude young people's 'voices' and interests. Exclusion can happen at a conceptual level. Examples include not considering how people may identify with chosen themes; how accessible the venue is for the elderly or people in wheelchairs; how expensive it is; how planned activities might only privilege those with good social skills; how differences are respected. Exclusion can also happen in the process of implementation. I saw an example of this when festival organisers made 'promises' to individuals but could not hold them. Alternatively it was a practical matter such as discovering the venues could not accommodate the people present.

VicHealth encourages festival organisers to create opportunities for the voices of those most marginalised to be expressed and heard. For example, the majority of the performers in the *Where the Heart Is* festival were homeless. The *Cooking Stories* project involved refugees coming together by sharing their migration experiences through telling stories about their relationship with food. It engaged refugees from older and younger migrant communities. Where genuine engagement was supported by celebration organisers this helped to raise the profile of those marginalised within a particular community and won trust. For example, in relation to the Aboriginal community in Horsham:

> *It made people aware of their existence. Historically they had been driven out of the region...Initially the Aboriginal community was very shy, now there is trust, and even an expectation to be involved* (Organiser, Art Is).

Many organisers sought to engage and include young people in planning, producing and performing. The *Flying Feathers* festival involved a core group of young people working with adults to come up with a series of activities that would challenge gender stereotypes. Young people were involved in the performances created by CERES and *Nati Frinj*. The *Woodford Folk Festival* had a whole separate children's festival and circus program and actively adopted a music program that would be attractive to youth.

9.5 Levels of engagement

I have devised a typology to distinguish how specific celebration activities are associated with three broad levels of engagement. The purpose of this typology is to highlight the different quality of social interaction that specific types of celebration activity typically enable.

Lower level engagement was typically associated with:
- commercial stalls
- art exhibitions
- information provision - show and tell
- watching / listening to music, story telling, debates, comedy, poetry, performances, film

Medium engagement (short term shared experience) was typically associated with:
- children (and adults) playing together
- dancing
- workshops or 'have a go' activities involving the visual arts, dance, music, sport, circus and walking activities
- creative / artistic production and performance including choirs, theatre which may include story telling and lantern making
- interactive education sessions such as discussions and question and answer formats and talking circles
- games, competitions and awards
- tree sponsorship and planting
- participatory parades

Deeper engagement (longer term involvement in potentially meaningful activity) was fostered through:
- dancing and playing music with intention
- collaborative creation of art forms that drew on personal experiences but also told a shared story
- participatory ceremony and ritual

Table 2: Levels of engagement

I can illustrate these varying engagements by describing my experience at the *Woodford Folk Festival*. This was my first time at the festival. I camped for the full six days. During this time I learnt to feel the rhythms of the festival which changed over the course of the day and over the course of the festival. My experience was influenced by the weather (it was very hot during the day), what the program offered, the other people I came in contact with, and my own sense of agency. It took me the first few days to unwind and get a feel for what the festival was about. I went on my own. Initially I just looked at the stalls and listened passively to the music. I felt separate and more of an observer. I nearly came home. However, over the next few days I began to dance and share meals with people at the communal tables at cafes. I participated in art and dance workshops. These were opportunities to meet people. I was soon 'adopted' be a group of friends who attended each year. By the time I watched the fire performance at the closing ceremony I felt like a member of the 'Woodford festival community'. Next time I will volunteer or seek to be part of the program in order to gain even a stronger connection.

This experience reiterated for me that becoming a member of a community is a process. Celebrations can contribute to a community forming as well as be a space where people experience, and learn, about being in community. The sporting competitions that were part of celebration activities held at the Loddon prison[20] involved prisoners having to play in a team and the Recreation Officer said they *"learnt how it is to be part of group, to feel needed and relied upon"*.

Both the *Woodford Folk Festival* and *Confest* were good examples of providing safe contexts for children and young people to know what it is to experience a caring community. One community celebration co-ordinator observed that the people she was working with did not know how to come together peacefully and that that there was often conflict.

> *It highlighted some clashes between people who live in area - one street against another. If you held an event in one house the others wouldn't come* (co-ordinator, Neighbourhood House).

[20] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

Children swore, fought and vandalised public property. It took several community celebrations for the young people and the families to learn how to be in the same place and space and even work together. This geographical community was an area of low socio-economic status and people had very little prior experience of their part of town, or themselves as residents, being celebrated.

9.6 Connecting to self

Celebrations are opportunities to reflect on who we have been, are and will be. I know for myself, celebrations have precipitated internal reflection about who I am, my aspirations, values, anxieties and relationships. Community celebrations provide an opportunity to value our own uniqueness and the connections we share with others. This may not be a straightforward process but requires a journey towards self acceptance, particularly if the developmental journey has not had healthy celebrations integrated into it along the way. An individual's internal agency may be compromised, or social connections are not available, or they require healing.

The depths to which an individual will go will be influenced by how the celebratory processes enable a person to journey inwards and in doing so reflect on their personal selves. For example, the function of many traditional shamanic practices that induce trance states through dance, movement and sound support deep journeying. They enable a person to experience on multiple dimensions at the same point in time. In doing so, learning about *being* in the moment while constantly *becoming* all that one can be. Shamanism is focused on the whole and so is always grounded in an ecological context and reinforces one's role within the web of life and hence, a sense of connectedness or *belonging*. Shamanic practices help one be conscious of the barriers that exist within one's mind and body to being, becoming and belonging and to allow for continual transformation.

9.7 Remaining connected across time

> As we announce who we are and who we are becoming…we also connect with a sense of humanity through time (Imber-Black and Roberts 1992, p. 53).

The earth's cycle continue over time. People grow older and die, gardens and crops grow and wither with the passing of seasons. Towns, cities and empires come and go. Time cannot be stopped despite any desire one might have for it to do so. Myerhoff and Arbor (1992) suggest one of the functions of ritual in complex social settings is to provide a sense of continuity. To connect us with our ancestors and future generations. Imber-Black and Roberts (1992) are family therapists who have found celebration and rituals can reinforce a family's sense of stability and continuity in the face of major changes such as death and divorce.

Several Jewish people mentioned that knowing others of their community were conducting rituals at the same time and in the same way as they were was important to them. *New Years Eve* when everyone counts down and celebrates, provides a sense of this across the general population in Australia.

Community celebrations also enable a community of witness to mark the passage of time. A simple example of this is at the welcoming ceremony of the *Woodford Folk Festival* which starts each year by acknowledging those who died during the year. Special performances honouring these people are often incorporated in the program.

9.8 Connecting to spirit

> When thousands and thousands of people around the earth are celebrating, singing, dancing, ecstatic, drunk with the divine, there is no possibility of any global suicide. With such festivity and with such laughter, with such sanity and health, with such naturalness and spontaneity, how can there be a war? Life has been given to create and to rejoice, and to celebrate. When you cry and weep, when you are miserable, you are alone. When you celebrate, the whole existence participates with you. Only in celebration do we meet the ultimate, the eternal. Only in celebration do we go beyond the circle of birth and death (Osho 1994, p. 157).

Festival and celebration planning has, in recent times, been shaped by a dominant concern for economic benefit. Despite this many of our contemporary celebration practices and forms derive directly or incorporate traditions from traditional religious celebrations and rituals whether they be those associated with the life cycle or regular events including weekly events such as Sabbath or annual ones such as Christmas. There is however, a continuum of celebration practices and beliefs. At one end there are practices prescribed by organised communities of practice including religious groups, and at the other are those that are spontaneous, local and self-defined.

Abraham Joshua Heschel is concerned about the lack of spiritual context of many contemporary celebrations.

> To celebrate is to contemplate the singularity of the moment and to enhance the singularity of the self. What was will not be again. The man of our time is losing the power of celebration. Instead of celebrating, he seeks to be amused or entertained. To be entertained is a passive state - it is to receive pleasure afforded by an amusing act or spectacle. Celebration is a confrontation, giving attention to the transcendent meaning of one's actions (in Blatner and Blatner 1988, p. 163).

Hallowell too believes that

> …contemporary 'western' cultures are suffering from a long legacy of detachment of celebration. Our spiritual lives have been mediated by bureaucratic and power mongering religious authorities, and, in modern times, the mechanistic ideology has desperately attempted to dismantle any semblance of sacred life. The power of celebration lies in its ability to transcend the mundane plane of profane life and to open up new possibilities for harmonious existence through the epiphanies of ecstatic experience and spiritual bonding (1995, p. 40).

Much of the early academic research in this area explored the relationship between religious (the sacred) and the non-religious (profane) (Schechner, 2002). While there is no clear definition of spirituality it is often seen as a personal individual sense of meaning in life and expresses one's relationships within the web of life. For others, it is the conscious connection to the creative force that drives all life. Sometimes little distinction is made between spirituality and religion. However, there is increasing

interest in defining a difference between the two with religion being seen as the institutionalisation of spirituality and involves adherence to shared beliefs and community of practice (Miller and Thorensen, 1999). David Tacey (2003a) has researched the role of spirituality in Australia in contemporary times, particularly in relation to young people. He has acknowledged the increasing trend towards spirituality, and religions that focus on people developing a personal relationship with the sacred. For many religions, connection with the sacred is seen to require an intermediary such as a priest.

Despite a growing interest in spirituality, little research has focused explicitly on spirituality as opposed to religion. Much of the debate about the value of religion in relation to health has focused on critiquing the methodological approaches adopted to gain such knowledge. While this is yet to be clarified there is a growing amount of research to suggest that a relationship exists between spirituality and health. For example, spiritual beliefs and religious practices can affect the way people understand health and illness; the strategies and resources they use to cope with illness; their resilience, resources and sense of support; decision-making about treatment, medicine and self care; their understanding of the role of health services; and day-to-day health practices (Haynes and Hilbers, 2005).

The potential benefits of religion are akin to the benefits of belonging to a community; being engaged in meaningful activity; prayer and meditation; potentially engaging in altruistic activities which helps an individual feel better about themselves; sense of inter-connectedness or belonging to community or spirit; and having a conceptual framework and rituals for dealing with suffering. These are similar themes to those raised in this research.

Contemporary religious groups have purpose-built buildings such as churches and temples. These are places where people come together to worship and celebrate. For Aboriginal Australians the land is held with deep respect and reverence. "Certain sites contain localised power and each of these identified sites is a repository of dreaming power and Dreaming consciousness" (Hume, 2002, p. 73). Australian Rules football fans and cricket fans hold the Melbourne Cricket ground in a similar regard. These groups would acknowledge the 'power' that is often held and retained in such

sites. This relationship with place is developed and enhanced through the events that have and continue to occur there (Paul Burgess in Hoban, 2005).

Dick Gross (1999) discusses in his book 'The Godless Gospel' the importance of ritual in people's lives even when they did not have a particular religious or spiritual affinity. For example, some may not identify as a practicing Jew but do identify with the Jewish community and actively integrated Jewish rituals into their life (for example, Passover, Hanika, Bar/bat Mitzvahs). The use of contemporary ritual and ceremony is a key feature in rising denominations such as *Hillsong*. Others are using community gatherings and celebrations to foster dialogue and exchange between various religious faiths in order to foster understanding and tolerance. Others yet again are creating spaces that allow individual expression of spirituality. *Firedance* is an example of an open, organic celebration which provides a communal space for people to develop and enjoy the spiritual in ways that are personally meaningful for them.

As mentioned previously, for some religious cultures such as Buddhism, gratitude of everyday life is part of the celebration of our everyday existence. To do so is to be conscious of the preciousness of life, to live in gratitude is to live a life of celebration. These concepts are not just restricted to Buddhism but many other traditional religions such as Kabbala, Hinduism, Sufism, Celtic and contemporary cosmologies.

> The inability to express our sense of ecstasy and gratitude for the gift of life constitutes a loss of meaning about our vocation and place in the larger life processes...Celebration is an essential part of the ritual of existence. For creatures of the millennium, we must remind ourselves that we are about a great work. It is a joy to be part of this grandeur (O'Sullivan 1999, p. 281).

Such an approach allows for a celebratory consciousness or mindfulness to exist in the everyday. Community celebrations allow this consciousness to be collectively generated.

9.9 Connecting with the earth

(Leunig 2001, p. 31)

I have chosen this cartoon by Michael Leunig as it expresses the simple joy that can be gained by consciously connecting with the seasons of the earth and life. This can be personally defined as Leunig illustrates through his celebration of 'swirling season'. It is also encapsulated in the following quote by Henry David Thoreau which was in the 2005 *Woodford Folk Festival* program.

> So live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each (Queensland Folk Federation, 2005).

We can experience connectedness not just to people but also to the context in which we live - the places where we frequent, the earth and the universe. Creating relationships with places is a key aim of many public art projects (Newmarch, 2000; McLeod, Pryor and Meade, 2004) and formal place-making programs (Winikoff, Barnes, Murphy and Nicholson, 2000). I have already discussed briefly how we become attached to churches, memorials and our towns. I would like to explore in

particular our connections beyond the man-made environment to the earth itself. O'Sullivan believes that in objectifying the earth, and seeing it as a natural resource for consumption we have become alienated from it (1999). Connecting with the natural environment is important for a number of reasons. Firstly the natural environment gives us a sense of context in something larger and ongoing. And secondly, we need the natural world to survive and celebration and ritual can be one way we engage in conscious relationship with the earth so that we look after it (and it can look after us). David Suzuki and Amanda McConnell (1997) write in *The Sacred Balance* about the inter-connectedness of all things on Earth and how everything we do has consequences that reverberate through the systems of which we are a part. They argue humans need to reclaim this ancient understanding and the responsibility that it entails. As ecologist Sarah Conn states, we need

> …to develop methods and forms that enable individuals to sense, think, feel and act as interdependent beings, interconnected within the whole community of life at all levels, from the individual psyche to a particular place on earth to the earth as a whole to the universe (2005, p. 532).

She goes on to advocate for processes that

> make lively, unmediated, direct contact with the world, listening and looking and sniffing and touching and feeling our connections not only with ourselves and each other but also with the earth, the sun, and the moon and the stars, as we learn to take our place in the interdependent web of life (2005, p. 534).

Environmentalists such as Joanna Macey and John Seed integrate ritual into their practice of deep ecology. This is intended to acknowledge and heal the environmental degradation experienced by the earth. Such processes also seek to create connection and empathy with the earth as a 'conscious' life force. In doing so, environmentalists who adhere to deep ecology take a more spiritual approach that recognises the transience of self, the living interdependency of all things and the value of the personal in communion (Go to www.joannamacey.net and www.rainforestinfo.org.au).

In indigenous cultures across the world there is a long tradition of using rituals to provoke empathy and kinship with the earth that encourages a subsequent responsibility to 'look after country' by maintaining a balanced physical and spiritual environment and contributing to the continuity and renewal of complex relationships between people and the land. Ceremony and celebration continually re-awakens and strengthens this connection.

Seasonal celebrations weave together seasons, patterns, places, and cycles such as food production and harvesting, as well as astrological movements such as solstice, equinox, full and new moon. As one Aboriginal educator informed me, his ancestors would come together when food was plentiful.

Australian Aborigines and other first nation cultures view humans as part of a web of life with humans acting as stewards and guardians of earth. Often these concepts have been captured in their cosmology that uses myth and ritual to educate each generation about how to engage in a respectful relationship with the earth.

> The land feeds and nurtures all the time, just like mothers always look after their children. If you do not have your mother with you, the land provides just about everything you need. That is why Aboriginal people sing about land, dance about land, tell stories about the land - because we have such a belonging to the land. We feel such deep sorrows, concerns and joys for the land that, to a point, we do not own the land - it owns us (Galarrwuy Yunnupingu, 1996).

This approach focuses on mutual obligation and gratitude for the sustenance that the earth provides. In contemporary culture humans have disassociated themselves from their environmental context and asserted power over the earth. Sylvie Shaw (2001) in her doctoral research asserted that many people living in urban contexts (86% of Australians according to the ABS, 2004c) have a tenuous relationship with the environment. Many city-dwellers are only barely aware, if at all, of the Earth's natural cycles and rhythms. The dominant contemporary Australian cultural discourse is no longer attuned with, or concerned about, the wellbeing of the planet. The earth is viewed as a resource for human use and consumption. This is evident by the degree of land degradation occurring across the planet (refer to *The Weather Makers* by Tim Flannery, 2005; McMichael, 2001). This is even the case for those who have an

intimate relationship with the land such as farmers and gardeners but who assert 'power over' rather than 'work with' nature.

But there are of course, those who claim more attention should be paid to our relationship with the earth. Horticulturalists such as Helen Cushing (2005) argue gardeners should re-think their relationship with their gardens and see them from a much broader environmental perspective. Increasingly health agencies such as the World Health Organisation are exploring the human - ecosystem relationship (see www.who.int./globalchange/en/).

Environmental themes and the concept of custodianship and communion with the environment are being taken up in a number of community celebrations and festivals (Baillie, 2003). In discussing *Earthstomp*, Kelly Rowe and Denise Groves explain,

> Songs, stories, dance, rituals and ceremonial gatherings reinforce our spiritual relationship with the Dreaming as well as our relationships and obligations to the Country and each other (2000, p. 159).

Stewardship of the land is also a key concept of the *Woodford Folk Festival* where an environmental theme runs through the festival. For example, the 2005 closing fire ceremony focused on the relationship between people and with planet earth. The Queensland Folk Federation who organise the *Woodford Folk Festival* bought land which had previously been used for dairy farming on which to hold the festival. They are seeking to re-generate the landscape and create an environmentally friendly festival by doing such things as replanting the site with trees, establishing water management systems, encouraging people to ride or take public transport to the venue and adopting environmentally friendly catering practices.

Other festivals such as *Confest* seek to provide spaces to discuss such topics as personal and planetary healing. As Graham St John explains, at

> Confest, healing and ecological awareness are persistent, related messages. The common strand connecting many workshops is the complex relationship between person and planet, between self-growth and Earth consciousness (2000, p. 87).

CERES use celebrations for multiple purposes. Freya Mathews (2000) discusses the use of festival as a re-awakening or re-enchantment of CERES as a site which had formerly been used as a rubbish dump. The festival organisers actively use celebration and ritual as a means to annually acknowledge what can be achieved and to renew commitment to the work occurring at their site. These rituals also seek to educate the community about environmental sustainability and are used to foster relationships with particular community groups. The *Kingfisher Festival* is an annual celebration of place, return of life and fertility. Each year the story of CERES is re-told. This includes re-telling how the kingfisher bird retreated in the face of environmental degradation and about its return in response to the efforts of local people to re-generate the land through re-vegetation and restoration. They view this as a symbol

> of peaceful coexistence between the people and the land in this locality. Mythic elements from Aboriginal culture are woven into the proceedings, and the Aboriginal custodians who lead the entire performance 'initiate' non-indigenous Australians into ancient local rituals of place, thereby inducing a more custodial consciousness in the new peoples, and inviting us all, indigenous and non-indigenous alike, to become 'reconciled' as one people through our common commitment to home place (Mathews, 2000).

The *CERES Autumn Harvest Festival* draws on migrant experiences of harvest traditions. It seeks to reinforce people's appreciation of the growing and eating of food - the importance of which is noted by Cameron.

> The danger of this great gift is that we take it for granted, we lose our relationship to the growing of food and the power of its creation. And if we do not understand the process of growth in the land and the meaning of harvest, we cannot find the joy of feasting within ourselves (1995, p. 145).

Some of the celebrations present in the contemporary Australian cultural life are derivatives of seasonal celebrations. That many do not align with the Australian context has already been noted. For example, Easter is originally a European spring festival and is held in the Australian autumn. The commercialisation of many celebrations often means people have little understanding of the origins and meanings behind them. I met several people who are reinterpreting traditional seasonal celebrations for the contemporary Australian context. Glenys Livingstone (2005) has

created a series of structured seasonal ceremonies as part of a religious practice, that aligns with astrological dates. I have participated in full moon, new moon, equinox and solstice gatherings. The approach adopted by Organic Dance (see www.organicdance.com.au) adopts a spiritual, personal transformational approach that allow for individual expression and input through movement and intention.

One community I was associated with was the University of NSW's Ecoliving Environment Centre who were keen to draw on the festival experiences of CERES. A winter solstice gathering for the Ecoliving community reinforced the power of such gatherings for one of the organisers who had not had participated in such an activity before.

> *It was a near full moon. The sky was so clear. Celebrants bearing candles snaked their way through the garden, accompanied by an instrumentalist. Our 'fire spirit' ignited a mighty bonfire. We proclaimed our desires for a better, less mean-spirited world. Then a single candle was carried from the bonfire to ignite candles accompanying each of the newly planted bushtucker plants, the illumination symbolised the passion of those individuals who were recognised for their achievements earlier in the day. The single flame from the bonfire then spread further, to light the lanterns which were to soon softly illuminate the expressive faces of the actors who honoured the true stories - and emotions - of the gathered audience. With a clear moon casting a silvery patina on the dewy surrounding foliage, the actors performed against a backdrop of a fecund forest of trees, and flowers. We had entered into the magical world of Shakespeare's midsummer night's dream.*
>
> *Earlier in the day we danced the sacred dances, and before that we heard the story of Ecoliving and we were reminded that Ecoliving is not about the property upon which it is sited but about the passion in the hearts of people working there. And throughout this whole day, midday-9pm; we ate the delicious food that was shared by the celebrants. I've never seen so many strangers come together to realise one purpose so gracefully.*

9.10 Spirals of connection

Intentional and communal ritual that explores our relationship with each other, the earth and cosmos is essential to enable us to be fully alive rather than passive spectators in life. People become active agents, consciously connecting to the deepest parts of themselves and the world around them. As has been discussed above, this needs to be done in a way that values each person and community's unique expression and does not seek to create or reinforce a particular ideology that oppresses others.

An example of this are *Firedance* festivals. Only two very small ones have been held in Australia. Firedance festivals originate in the USA (for example, see www.spiritfirefestival.org). Firedances are focused on transformation and free expression. They are designed with a focus on night-to-dawn ritual fire circles where people co-create sacred space for exploration through chanting, dance, poetry, drumming, music, ritual theatre, song, movement, art, rhythm and ceremony. Everyone is invited to contribute in a way that is right for them at that point in time. There are those who hold designated responsibilities for creating a safe space for individual journeying and transformation, drummers who keep the drumming going, dancers whose energy and dance support the drummers. Others are 'in service' and make sure people eat and drink. And there are healers who support the energy of the group and individuals as needed. In doing so, the community becomes one pulsing being - in rhythm, in the flow. Responsibilities are shared throughout the evening across the five days of the festival. Workshops held in the day to educate people about how people can contribute.

The process and structure of *Firedance* also highlights one way we become more aware of our relatedness and the responsibilities this entails. We experience a sense of unity. This is the theme that will be explored in the next section. But first, I will explore how celebrations build community capacity.

Chapter 10: The Contribution Celebrations can make to Building Community Capacity: Volunteering and Learning

> Every time a person uses his or her capacity, the community is stronger and the person more powerful. That is why strong communities are basically places where the capacities of local residents are identified, valued and used (Asset Based Community Development Institute in Black and Hughes 2001, p. 19).

10.1 Recognising the potential of celebrations to build community capacity

The process of planning and managing a celebration enables a community to utilise its assets and build on them. The co-ordinator of a local festival in regional Victoria said:

> *It became a vehicle through which residents learnt new skills, met new people, and were awakened to the possibility of what their community can achieve when everyone works towards a common goal.*

Stern and Seirfert (2002) assert that there is a correlation between the strength of a community and levels of cultural activity. In any neighbourhood or small town celebrations are an important part of cultural activities. Hallowell proposes celebrations where rituals take place "allow for the unfolding of communal powers which are greater than the sum of the parts" (1995, p. 42). In doing so, they unlock communal energies that may otherwise remain dormant (Bird in Myerhoff and Arbor 1992, p. 105).

Several of the community celebrations I studied in Victoria arose out of, or actively sought, relationships with other community building initiatives. Some were driven by government programs such as the Victorian Connecting Confident Communities which aimed to identity and support local leaders.

Other celebrations were a flagship activity of 'learning communities'. Others again were initiatives of government workers with a community development agenda. A more specific example is the celebration at Loddon Prison that was part of the *Healthy Prisons* movement. And then at the Atherton Estate a *Fringe Feast*[21] became a feature of an urban renewal program.

> *This event hangs off the other things we do, building a town centre, community leadership, it creates a focus on the town and therefore is part of the Township plan. This is one way that combines these things, because often 'Learning Town' can seem abstract* (organiser and community worker, Mt Evelyn).

But in most cases, celebrations are not seen by planners and policy managers as an activity that contribute to building community capacity. For example, in local government authorities across Australia, celebrations are managed by departments separate to those responsible for community capacity building. Celebrations are valued more for their tourism and regional economic development spin-offs. The practical consequences of this can be that while celebrations may indeed have community building spin-offs they are organised and sustained on fragile budgets with a heavy reliance on volunteers in danger of burning out. A community worker with a festival in Melbourne described this.

> *Initiating relationships with communities meant that you learn about many of their needs. These needs might have to do with employment, emancipation through social awareness, education etc. My role becomes very challenging when I can see important needs during the process of the festival development that I cannot meet. There is barely the time to put the festival together often writing grants for another project while delivering an event so it is impossible to follow up leads that you identify as been able to help people beyond the community celebration you are working on…The role sometimes felt very limited to event management, I had to pull back from my initial wider networking which is so necessary to create long term*

[21] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

> *meaningful community development and change - to truly empower communities. The festival is very meaningful, however to sustain that meaning you need to have a great deal of lead up time and follow up time. But in a community centre like CERES where your job relies on you sourcing external funding. I was always chasing funding. I think that it is just not possible to sustain the community development part of the event without leaving big holes in the process* (multicultural worker, CERES festivals team).

Subsequently, these festivals and celebrations tended to sit outside of, or be disconnected from other activities happening in the area. These are lost opportunities. While support may have been provided by local government for public liability and permission granted to hold the events, many local government agencies did not have a cultural development agenda and subsequently the celebrations were not valued as a community building tool.

> *Local government in the region is not supportive of community builders initiative or smaller communities. The focus is on* [the regional centre] *and bigger projects. They do not have a community cultural development position. It is difficult to get support for community work* (community worker).

The success of community celebrations was used by some communities to demonstrate to local government the role of the arts in building community, leading to more active support of the arts over time.

There are many dimensions to community capacity - for example, community engagement, social capital, cultural pride and identity, valuing diversity, political awareness, creative capacity - that are discussed in other chapters. The remainder of this chapter will focus on two additional themes identified in the data analysis. The first being volunteering which is an indicator of civic engagement and community participation. Secondly, individual and community learning.

10.2 Volunteering: a key indicator of community capacity

Celebrations are able to generate high levels of energy and willingness from people to be actively involved, not just in participating but also in organising. At the heart of community capacity is a willingness for a wider range and larger number of people to volunteer their time to plan and organise activities.

A high level of volunteerism was exhibited in the community celebrations I examined. For example, over 200 people volunteered for the 2004 *CERES Autumn Harvest Festival* and 2,000 volunteers support the *Woodford Folk Festival* each year.

Several rural based celebration organisers commented how people were still willing to volunteer despite financial difficulties being experienced as result of drought. Volunteers spoke of how they appreciated the opportunity to do something for their community or to use skills they were not currently using.

> *I feel like I have the skills. At the festival I got to show this a bit* (cultural teacher, CERES)

> *It is a pleasure to use my skills in a community context* (new migrant and volunteer, CERES Autumn Harvest Festival).

One community leader I spoke to valued the opportunity for women to take a leadership role for a change.

Several services and groups reported they increased membership as a result of organising a celebration or through showcasing themselves at one.

> *Groups who put on displays - all reported much interest being shown by new residents as well as others who were looking to become involved in their community more, sometimes because of retirement giving them more time and some expressed a desire to become more involved socially. Some expressed interest in joining the group* (volunteer organiser, Dunnolly).

Other communities found the celebrations were revitalising for the community. For example, the Orbost's *Snowy Errinundra Festival* committee is now considered one of the most vibrant in the community.

> *It is one of the few community committees people are elected and compete to get involved in. It has a lot of energy* (director, Community Health, Orbost).

The *Ouyen Rain-dance* reported an increase in participation on local committees from *"3 or 4 old people … to 30 to 40 people, mostly middle aged"* (organiser, Ouyen Rain-dance).

10.2.1 Challenge of sustaining volunteers and celebrations that build grassroots community capacity

Levels of community capacity to engage in celebrations ebb and flow over time.

> *The volunteer co-ordinator is leaving which will leave a huge void that will be difficult to fill. She just had all the skills and experience in looking after volunteers, recruiting, the whole process we could hand over to her. She did such a brilliant job* (director, Art Is…).

> *…problem with drivers, leaders move on…* (community worker, Maryborough).

For example, celebrations go through cycles where the core organising group can either retain control but find over time that they 'burn out' or they seek to build the skills and resources of others to provide support and eventually 'take over'. The *Mallacoota Festival* started as a small arts festival but over time it grew into a large tourist based festival. Its decline can be attributed to a number of factors including, the organising group experiencing 'burn out', the focus on professional art forms and lack of engagement with other parts of the community, and the increasing focus on tourism alienating local people. In recent times the festival has been scaled back to focus on the local community. This was well received.

> *One of the most important things is participation and community involvement and that's what we got this year. People were saying there was no pressure and they had time to go and do what they wanted to do. It was like the festivals of old, back in the 1980s when organisers were able to enjoy themselves* (festival organiser).

Other festivals such as *Art Is…* whose primary purpose is on capacity building and local expression rather than tourism, manage these issues by constantly seeking to draw in new people by focusing on their interests and building their skills over time. This approach enables continual transformation and flow of people in and out of the festival in a more sustainable way.

> *Part of the reason of why they have the legs they have now is because of the work of the 'Art is...' festival in building some of that community capacity to pull together that stuff and encouraging community and artists and giving people the right to step beyond their boundaries…to nurture people to actually do that from its conception. That is why it can stand alone now* (community development worker, Horsham).

> *We now have local people who can deliver our sound and lighting* (community development worker, Art Is…).

Festival director, Bill Hauritz discusses how he achieves this in the *Woodford Folk Festival*.

> I try to swap people around in jobs. People get stale and need a change, new challenges. It's good to have people where they want to be. After a while people have done many jobs and this gives us a large base of experience (in Cameron 1995, p. 113).

Recognising that each community has a distinct level of capacity is an important part of the community building process. *Where the Heart Is* was put on by health workers for the homeless, many of whom are cognitively impaired. The Manager of the Royal District Nursing Service said they would "…*love to hand over to the Homeless*

Persons Foundation. But they are in an embryonic stage… this is something we will have to work towards over time."

Discussions with festival and celebration organisers suggest there are several knowledge- value- and skills- sets required with creating celebrations that enhance health and wellbeing. These include:

1. Commitment to a **community development** approach. That is enabling others to be involved and participate in a way that is personally meaningful for them.
2. **Event management** or organisational skills such as venue management, dealing with the media and addressing risk management requirements.
3. The ability to **plan** an event and **evaluate** in ways that support critical self reflection.
4. Ability to deal with **administrative** requirements including budget management.
5. Supporting people to **creativity** and artistic express themselves in a range of ways, be they visual, movement or music.
6. **Interpersonal** skills such as communication, networking, negotiation, public speaking and listening.
7. **Technical** skills including use of selected equipment such as computing, audio, lighting.
8. Understanding themselves, their strengths and areas they find challenging or need further development. And how to **work with** other individuals and groups in a way that values each persons gifts and talents. As well as the ability to deal with disagreements and conflict.
9. **Process** skills in working with people such as being able to work in collaborative and responsive ways.
10. **Personal qualities** of honesty, trust, respect, responsibility, appreciation, affirmation, commitment, integrity, flexibility.
11. Willingness to **critically self reflect** and engage in ongoing learning.
12. Commitment to **equality, valuing diversity** and **social inclusion.**

Different communities demonstrated different capacities for each of these. Some communities had access to or had the resources to buy in people with a high level of skill in this area who were able to provide leadership. Sometimes communities relied

on one or two individuals to provide leadership which placed a great deal of pressure on these people. This was the case for the *Where the Heart Is* festival.

> *Having said this we do recognise that it was driven by a core group of people and leadership of two people.*

This was often very demanding experience for these individuals. As the director of the *Art Is…* festival explained

> *…need to have your creative side of the brain happening but you also need to have a handle on the figures and the management of the people and I do a lot of most of the promotions and publicity as well and sponsorship. You know your brain just gets divided into so many pieces.*

The employment of a festival co-ordinator was seen as critical by some to the success of the logistical organisation and the smooth running of the festival. Having access to ongoing funding support was also seen as important. Success in one year in getting funding can generate enthusiasm and energy that can be subsequently devastating if there is no further support. Those communities that exhibited greater experience in conducting festivals and associated activities such as grant writing demonstrated they were skilled at attracting larger amounts of funding.

It is important to recognise the physical capacity of some communities. In rural towns in particular, many communities did not have spaces for people to congregate, or those spaces were in disrepair. The festivals in many instances celebrated newly created or renovated spaces or highlighted the need for community spaces. Several small communities have since sought to enhance the public spaces they have available (for example repairing halls, providing seating). The *Woodford Folk Festival* as a large scale festival on a purpose built site annually reinvests any profits made back into site development and revegetation.

There were examples where an activity initiated or 'trialed' as part of a community celebration continued on an ongoing basis. This included yoga classes, farmers markets, choirs, touring performances and exhibitions, art activities, monthly dinners,

a catering business and advocacy groups. There were also examples where skills gained in creating and managing celebrations were transferred to address other community issues and concerns. For example, the skills gained by the Ouyen community in organising the *Ouyen Rain-dance* were effectively used to fight plans by the Victorian Governments to locate a toxic waste site nearby.

10.3 Learning by community, for community and with community

Traditionally celebrations may not be associated with learning because they are seen as too 'playful'. However, I would argue they are potentially rich learning environments where formal, informal and incidental learning opportunities can be provided as part of the organising as well as participating.

And just because something is playful this does not exclude it being educational. John Heron is a humanist educational theorist recognises the value of informal education environments and suggests that 'playfulness' is important for learning.

> People learn more effectively when they are enjoying themselves and what they are doing; when they are satisfying some felt need or interest, and are emotionally involved in what has personal relevance to them; when they feel good about the whole idea of learning and the exercise of their learning competence; when they feel confident, secure and in a low threat, co-operative, non competitive situation (1992, p. 229).

The informal education opportunities provided by community celebrations were well recognised by many I spoke with. I will offer a definition of informal education after the following quotes.

> *Great because it teaches young people about culture and food without them having to rely on books but through real life experiences* (volunteer, CERES Autumn Harvest Festival).

> *It was a great experience, very new to me and I learnt stuff about other countries and styles of different music* (student and participant, Art Is…).

> *It promotes our culture in positive way. People get to see and learn* (Koori artist and resident, Art Is…).

> *I believe that it is one of the best ways to learn something about a group or a community.*…(Turkish community representative, Broadmeadows).

Many community celebrations sought to inform people about local organisations and community groups. For example, the community development worker at Broadmeadows Health Service noted the series of cultural festivals they held with the Aboriginal, Turkish and Arabic communities led to "*increased use of the service by participants including one very shy Koori man who previously had not stepped foot in the service"*.

Celebrations are sites of learning. In some cases this happens through short courses. When the courses are accredited this can be defined as formal education. When the courses are non-accredited this can be defined as non-formal education. But, in fact much of the learning happens without a formal or non-formal course. Some learning happens in an unplanned way. And so this can be called incidental learning. However, a lot of meaningful learning happens because conditions and experiences in the celebrations have been planned by organisers. I define this as informal education.

What is the nature of learning in celebrations? I will use a typology inspired by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (see Foley, 1995). A common example of learning is when community celebration organisers and artists and volunteers gain skills in how to plan, promote and manage the logistics of an event. People I interviewed spoke about how they gained knowledge and skills in how to work with each other as members of an organising committee including, social skills, team building, negotiating and decision making in group situations. This is skill based or instrumental learning.

> *CERES staff train community leaders in planning, management, administration, marketing and publicity, production such as setting up, stalls and organising cooking materials* (festival organiser, CERES).

The festival has created a skills database containing details for festival supporters, artists, performers and volunteers. Support is provided in developing skills in risk management, audience development, writing funding submissions etc (community cultural development worker, Horsham).

Mentoring has enabled my son to learn more about directing and producing performance events (Koori parent, Horsham).

Built local skills in event management including managing a large event, liaising with local, national and international media (volunteer organiser, Ouyen Rain-dance).

Art Is… has been a catalyst. It has trained a lot people. There is confidence within the community in planning and running events. Recently Horsham was successful in putting on a concert for Triple J. This drew on the people involved in Art Is… We pulled off Triple J because of our skills and experiences (director, Art Is…).

The festival makes me feel good, it makes me learn more and get involved with people. And also getting to know other people…had to be a leader to organise all these different people, which I think is hard, and I learned from him about it. We had to learn teamwork, which is a good thing (cultural teacher, CERES).

There were those too who drew on interpretive and emancipatory traditions and facilitated processes that sought to foster awareness of the social, political and environmental contexts we are embedded within and to improve individual and community agency.

This was most often undertaken by people who drew on community cultural development traditions and the work of Paulo Freire (1970, 1992). These 'popular' educators use creative processes that enable the most disempowered and marginalised

in society to share their world with others. This enables people within the broader community to learn more about the diversity of people living within their community and hear the voices of those who are usually silenced. This was a particular focus of the festivals supported by the *Communities Together* funding scheme which focused on the most marginalised in the community including refugees, homeless, people with disabilities, young people and people of Aboriginal descent. Many used the visual arts, music and performance to present their experiences and struggles. And to share stories of strength and resilience.

Many celebration organisers and community observers mentioned people's belief in their own efficacy or capacity to be more actively involved in 'community life' was an important outcome. For example, the *Thong on the Roof* short film festival showcased the work of young people. It provided opportunities for young people to gain new skills, be in control and take action. They learnt to give voice to their world and to make choices. It was managed by young leaders with mentoring support from a local community worker.

Formal learning opportunities were a core strategy in several festivals. For example, *Art is…, Mt Evelyn Festival*[22] and the *Cooking Stories* project adopted more active skill exchanges between professionals and volunteers with the explicit purpose of building, retaining and replacing skills sets within the local community. This included event management, administration, technical and, artistic and creative skills.

> *The events coach has become a stroke of genius in getting people on board, he had guided, supported people and affirmed people who've been involved before* (community worker and organiser, Mt Evelyn).

> *I employ people from each group as well, and we have what we call a learning agreement* (community cultural development worker, Cooking Stories).

There were many examples where volunteers gained skills that led to other opportunities for them to be paid to take on similar roles, and for some, even ongoing

[22] See appendix one for a brief description.

paid employment. A review of the volunteering program at CERES highlighted that volunteers in the CERES festivals were being upskilled and as a result they were offered other work.

> *Skills have led to a range of employment and other roles such as teaching in the arts, cultural development officer, professional photographer, events co-ordinator and director, promotions roles, artistic director positions, roles within regional arts Victoria including the Board and the management and artistic programming teams for the Regional Arts Australia Conference 2004, setting up successful graphic design and textile import businesses, co-ordinating other arts projects and events, and photography work for the local newspapers* (director, Art Is…).

> *…we've seen personal growth happening right through, not only just from this event, though definitely from organising it…also because of her extension into the community itself… the community then recognises that that person has those skills and draws on them more* (community worker, Maryborough).

> *I started a traditional Aboriginal dance group in 1995. Over the years I have learnt how to perform and give an audience what they want. I've leant how to make screen sets, films, to use sound equipment and improved my dancing skills. Involvement will continue and has led to other work opportunities. It has helped get me full time work as part of the Harrow cricket exhibition. Given me skills and confidence. I have had the experiences of dancing and performing in front of 500-800 people. Have met a lot of people around town, played didge in some bands and learnt to organise my own show* (young Koori artist, Horsham).

The above hints at the processes that support learning. For example, they draw on people's experiences, knowledge and skills. They build peoples confidence and expertise in a responsive but innovative ways. They enable people to learn from and with each other. They are interactive and participatory. They support people to develop their problem solving and critical thinking abilities. The degree to which this

is achieved of course is dependent on the processes adopted by the educators or practitioners involved. The role of the practitioner is explored further in section three.

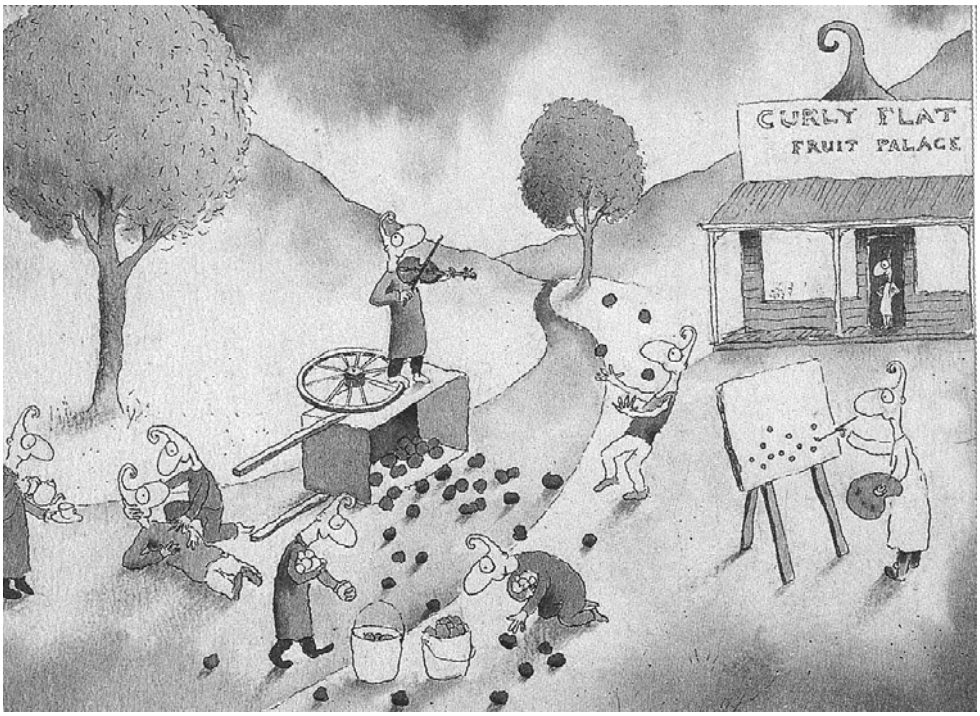
This section has only touched on some of the contextual and contingent learning opportunities celebrations provide. This is a theme interwoven throughout much of this thesis. For example, how story making and telling supported learning and community change will be discussed in chapter 13. These illustrate how celebrations can provide a responsive and engaging learning context. While other examples are provided that discuss how the celebration experience enabled opportunities for personal growth and community transformation.

The next section will outline how the planning and facilitation of celebrations can enhance or inhibit this possibility.

SECTION 3: PLANNING AND FACILITATING CELEBRATIONS

This section will focus on celebration practice and what practices contribute to health and wellbeing, when and for whom. This will be undertaken by exploring:

- how population diversity is valued and unity can be fostered;
- the role of power within celebrations;
- the creative and mythopoetic dimensions of celebrations; and
- professional practice knowledge.



In Curly Flat unforseen circumstances are celebrated…
accidents bring out the best in people (Leunig 2001, p. 5)

Chapter 11: The Challenges of Creating Celebrations that Foster Unity and Value Diversity

> We identify ourselves and our communities in part by the exclusion of others and these exclusions both reflect and help establish divisions of power (John and Potter 2002, p. 272).

There is an interplay between celebrations that value the individual, foster connection with others like oneself, those that seek to value diversity across communities and identifying with the 'whole of' community in ways that respects individual diversity.

Ambler, Horsfall, Vesley, Pinn, Sammon and Waterford in the paper they presented at the *Celebrations for Development and Change* forum I convened in 2002 discussed how historically, unity and sameness was often privileged and difference and contradictions were suppressed and this has led to practices of exclusion and silencing. Valuing diversity in relation to people recognises all dimensions of population diversity including ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, disability, sexual orientation, and social roles such as parenting and eldercare, and views these as an asset. The importance of valuing diversity is recognised in mental health and community building discourses (Black and Hughes, 2001; VicHealth, 2005a; Prilleltensky, forthcoming a). Prilleltensky views it as an essential measure of 'relational' wellbeing between individuals and communities.

Celebrations are symbols of who is included and excluded, both overtly and covertly, within a community. Ros Derrett concluded that, "the more tolerant and embracing the festival the more tolerant and embracing the community" (2000, p. 124).

11.1 Multicultural celebrations

'Multiculturalism' is a "public policy designed to ensure the full socio-economic and political participation of all members of an increasingly diverse population" (Castles 1997, p. 120). Multiculturalism replaced the 'White Australia' policy which was not completely phased out until 1973. One manifestation of support for the policy of

multiculturalism by Australian governments, particularly at the local level has been the funding of cultural festivals, food fairs, multicultural days, fiestas and arts projects that have become ubiquitous (Dunn, Hanna and Thompson, 2001). Traditionally, though not always, this type of festival would involve newer migrant communities showcasing their traditional food, dance and music, speeches by community leaders and displays of cultural objects. There is little emphasis on ideas and issues. Such festivals have been dubbed 'spaghetti and polka' festivals. Several of the celebrations reviewed in my research were multicultural festivals or celebrations. Given their popularity and the importance of valuing diversity within a wellbeing framework I have chosen to examine them a little more closely. This will help to provide insight into what type of celebratory practices are beneficial and for whom.

11.2 Positive contributions of multicultural festivals

Those who champion multicultural festivals and celebrations typically argue they make the following positive contributions.

Affirmation of local talents

Lynn and Snyder state

> as long as people feel that their differences will bring social rejection and isolation, many will be unwilling to publicly share their unique beliefs, perspectives and skills (2002 p. 404).

Celebrations provide an opportunity for community members to realise and affirm the unique talents, interests and skills, of individuals and groups. This can bring about attitude changes in how people view their community and how individuals view themselves.

Public representation

Community festivals are a vehicle to enable visual exposure or exchanges between existing and newer communities. Thus they act as a visible symbol of cultural pluralism. Within some communities this can provide the only means of personally viewing and or exchanging customs, music, dance and food in a public as opposed to a private setting as illustrated by the following attestations.

> *…growing up (in Horsham) the Koori community was invisible, they had no community profile. Now there is a lot more respect, tolerance, they feel confident about being involved* (artist, Horsham).

> *A local Koori dance group did the official welcoming which was the first time this has happened in our community* (organiser, Ouyen Rain-dance).

> *A lot of locals cheer us on…when we walk down street and ask us 'what have we got planned' …they are excited…they love the boys* (Koori artist and performer, Horsham).

Social connectedness and bonding

Community celebrations create opportunities for people to gather and to develop social connections. Research by VicHealth (2003c) found this to be particularly beneficial for new migrants who have to develop new social networks. Further, inclusive community celebrations potentially provide an opportunity for interactions between people who may not usually identify with each other.

Identity

Celebrations provide an opportunity for new and emerging communities to strengthen their sense of identity and distinctiveness, and capacity to express their 'own' culture. This helps migrants to "redefine place and citizenry, as well as constructing shared

values" (Dunn, Hanna and Thompson, 2001, p. 15). Christopher Sonn suggests "histories, memories and stories are negotiated in the new context and become resources and provide meaning for people as they imagine new futures for future generations" (2002, p. 216). This can be an important source of comfort and continuity for new migrant groups who fear losing a sense of identity and traditional cultural values. This was in evidence by the comments from participants and organisers of the *CERES Autumn Harvest Festival*.

> *She relates to the day as part of her cultural heritage, she remembers in Africa visiting her relatives who grew wheat and sugar, and how they loved having feasts when family got together* (female participant of South African descent).

> *The Harvest Festival, which is also a blend, gives me nostalgic feelings of growing up in Colombia. Of course it is older there, while here at CERES it is new, but it is still very real* (educator, CERES).

> *It means a lot to the women to be able to share their culture, to make people feel that they are not that different from others, but that they are proud to be Iraqi. It gives the women an identity in the community - they feel recognised* (cultural teacher, CERES)

Working together on a common activity such as a public performance can foster dialogue within groups about the nature of their cultural identity. For example, the *Art Is…* festival encouraged and provided a mechanism for the local Aboriginal community to develop cultural protocols.

Cultural appropriateness was an important issue for celebration organisers. Several organisers I spoke with explained how they would undertake research and consultation to ensure the development of culturally appropriate activities. This led to identity development and bridges being built between individuals and groups that may not otherwise have connected. Through one festival in Victoria this is currently occurring for the migrant community from the Horn of Africa, which is seeking to

form connections between people who have migrated from Northern Africa. In fact, these groups back in Africa were at war.

Learning opportunities

Many migrants see these festivals as opportunities to educate younger generations about the traditions, beliefs and practices associated with their cultural heritage. With the focus in Australia on assimilation up until 1973 not all children of post-war migrants readily identified with the traditions of their parents' country of birth.

> *There was an engineer who was Turkish. He came along and told me how it is great to have a day like this. He was embarrassed about his identity as a kid. He used to get teased* (community organiser, Turkish Festival, Broadmeadows Health Service).

For some migrants, these traditions become more important to them than they had in the past. Festival organisers commented how there is increasing interest amongst younger generations in learning about the cultural heritage of their grandparents.

This sharing of culture extends not just within ethnic communities but between communities. Lack of exposure to people from a variety of cultural backgrounds was an impetus for several community celebrations. For example, the multicultural flavour adopted by the 2003 and 2004 *Art Is…* festivals was in response to the level of racism and the lack of experience many young people had in interacting with people from a diverse range of backgrounds which the new festival director, a teacher in the region, had observed. The focus was on providing cultural exchanges predominantly between visiting artists and locals. Cross-cultural exchanges became learning opportunities. People too often expressed a sense of pride at sharing 'their' culture with others.

> *Events bring people together and create happy communities - a place where people of different cultural communities can come and learn from each*

> *other and share their culture with others* (participant, CERES Autumn Harvest Festival).
>
> *…but I think the most important thing is the mix of cultures, because if you see and interact with different people it helps to break down prejudices. Especially when you do things together, like eating, singing, celebrating together* (teacher, CERES of Columbian descent).
>
> *There is an increase in diversity of kids attitudes* (director and local teacher, Art Is…).

The *Sydney Dreaming Festival* provided learning opportunities by passing on traditions between older and younger generations and across a range of Aboriginal communities. This was seen as important as there are only two or three song men left and communities cannot do ceremony without them.

Sense of place

> Sense of place links issues of place (where we are) to issues of identity (who we are) (Waller 2003, p. 4).

Hugh Mackay (2005b) argues that a sense of place is crucial to our sense of self, community, mortality and sense of destiny. In relation to migrants a sense of place can be important in a number of ways. Firstly, remembered places can be important symbolic anchors for people (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Festivals often draw on people's memories and experiences of birth places. Secondly, they can build relationships with new places. The artistic directors of the *Big West*[23] festival used art-installations in order for people to create a new relationship with local spaces and places including shopping centres and corner shops.

> *Community cultural development is not just about people. It is about working with place and land. For example, take a corner milk bar and have*

[23] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

an artist come in and re-interpret its relationship to the place through art via for example a slide show. So people's sense of story and understanding and why they value it is heightened and changed. Or an artist who builds a sculpture next to the milk bar and the community participates in that process (director, Big West).

With a project like Rice Paddies which was an installation performance work we put a 20 by 8 metre rice paddy in the middle of the Footscray mall and invited people to respond by writing on pieces of pater that were hung on trees. A lot of people had stories that related (director, Big West).

The Village is a project about setting up a framework which is a design space that various cultural groups can use to interpret the local context. Contrast this to an old fashioned fair where an ethnic dance troupe perform on stage. The Village is about creating small spaces for about 100 people to walk through (director, Big West).

The potential of art as place-making is well recognised by government agencies including VicHealth as part of their community art funding scheme (see www.vichealth.vic.gov.au).

The importance of having informal meeting spaces within the public domain is recognised by sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1989). He coined the term 'third place'. First places are with families and second places in workplaces. Oldenburg was interested in where else people make social connections. They can, according to Oldenburg, include cafes and street corners. They can, of course, also include celebrations. However, the media often presents images of groups congregating in public spaces such as beaches and local shopping centres in a negative way. People are now asked to watch others and report suspicious behaviour. This increasingly positions festivals as one of the few sanctioned and 'accepted' spaces for large numbers of people to intentionally come together. Finally festivals contribute to creating more pleasant places, at least in the short term (Permezel and Duffy, 2003). This is particularly important for newer migrant groups who often reside in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

11.3 Potential limitations of multicultural festivals

However, not all celebrations achieve the above for all people, all of the time. Cultural festivals and the 'spaghetti and polka' model adopted under the multiculturalism banner, in particular, can be viewed as limited in a number of ways.

Difference and 'Othering'

The 'typical' multicultural festival involves non-English speaking 'ethnic' cultures engaging in traditional cultural activities involving food and the arts, while the perceived dominant cultural group takes on the role of observer. In Australia this is the Anglo Celtic majority. One view is that the fixed formats often adopted by multicultural festivals actually work to control social identity. This can be seen as a form of cultural tourism or form of exoticisation where ethnic cultures are objectified by others (Vetocec in Dunn, Hanna and Thompson 2001, p. 9). Furthermore Dunn, Hanna and Thompson (2001) go on to discuss that while the aim is to promote tolerance, it is a cause of intolerance as it gives authority to a dominant group to judge the appropriateness of other cultures. Lynch (1999) too argues that when the focus is on 'difference' this serves to strengthen the power of the dominant group.

Another limitation of this approach is that it can act to perpetuate the myth that the dominant group does not have a 'culture'. This can result in a lack of consciousness within this group about their own beliefs and practices and how they shape their behaviours. Only 'others' have a 'culture' and are seen to be the cause of problems.

Diversity within and over time

Grouping all people of a particular heritage together such as new Greek migrants with the great grandchildren of Greek migrants, suggests homogeneity. But there is diversity that exists within these culturally defined groupings. This too privileges one aspect of an individual, their cultural heritage over other personal dimensions such as

gender, socio-economic status, education, sexuality, profession, parenting status etc. This shallow representation of heterogeneity of cultures, Jupp argues, can lead to the 'success' of multiculturalism to be measured by the level of cultural difference maintained (in Permezel and Duffy 2003, p. 14).

Building on this point, the 'spaghetti and polka' festival format can be seen as frozen in time and so presenting a static as opposed to dynamic depiction of culture. This can restrict understanding of how migrants adapt and negotiate within their new place of residence.

Communities are not monolithic or essential in nature, instead they are comprised of a multiplicity of voices and concerns. The contemporary migrant experience is often not heard. This can include stories of arrival, integration, resilience and wellbeing. The individual too has multiple identities - an 'Australian and Italian, a father, a husband, a son, a migrant, employer/employee' and so forth, and negotiates each of these within differing contexts.

Allowing for a wide range of cultural expression was found to be one of the reasons for the success of the *Maleny [Woodford] Folk Festival*. "The festival has created a cultural meeting place for us all to share our beliefs, our feelings and our hopes for the future" (Cameron 1995, p. 31). The Woodford Folk Festival too was an example of honouring traditional and contemporary traditions. There is a great deal of fusion between traditional and contemporary music forms. Perhaps in part, this is because it involves innovative artists who are often pushing the boundaries of cultural expressions. Respectful recognition of the traditional owners was in evidence with a strong Murri theme running through the festival including the opening ceremony. And with Murri stallholders and stages being placed at the entrance area of the festival site. It created a communal space where people interacted and worked collaboratively in workshops, forums and participatory performance. There was a strong ambience of respect for diversity. In fact it was the cultural 'norm' within the context of the festival.

Play versus politics of difference

It has been argued by Young (in Dunn, Hanna and Thompson, 2001) that multicultural festivals focus on the 'play of difference' rather than a 'politics of difference' and ignore social justice and racism issues that lead to social and economic disadvantage (Permezel and Duffy, 2003). An audit conducted by Dunn, Hanna and Thompson (2001) found this is in part because most local government agencies have adopted multicultural festivals as their primary multicultural strategy. Few have explored how power is excised by local government and undertaken other strategies to address the systemic issues that reinforce racism and social inequalities. The same can be said for many other organisations be they schools, health and welfare agencies or even local community groups. This is in part has contributed to a devaluing amongst some practitioners I spoke with who viewed multicultural festivals as tokenistic and demeaning. I would suggest that to there is little opportunity for people whether they be paid practitioners or volunteers, to engage in conscious reflection on how power is exercised in society and the role festivals play (or could play) in disempowering people and reinforcing divisions. Rather people tend to hope that their 'good intentions' will be sufficient to make a positive difference.

Fostering division not unity

Some festivals were seen by some as a vehicle for reinforcing divisions within and across communities. The *Mallacoota Festival* was an example where the influx of large numbers of tourists (and a particular type of tourist) was resented by some within the community. Subsequently the festival was compounding divisions within the community. This theme has been reflected within a number of other communities. There are many examples of local community protest at festival themes, content and process. For example, flying non-Australian flags as part of the *Celebrating Difference* program led to protests by several older members of the Broadmeadows community.

In multicultural festivals there is also typically tension over who is represented and how. There were those who viewed festivals as simply reinforcing one-dimensional

stereotypes. Organisers might comment on how 'great' the festival was, but others would say how they did not feel represented, included or consulted. Part of the tensions would appear to be between traditional and contemporary expectations. For example, community leaders who are often first generation migrants may see it is as their obligation and duty to uphold traditions. Gate keeping by 'community leaders' was viewed as common not just within 'ethnic' communities but occurred across all communities.

I found festival organisers could either help to alleviate or compound tensions and conflict. Some tensions were simply misunderstandings or resulted from differing expectations. Some organisers provided opportunities for people to meet and discuss their different points of view. While others took more innovative approaches. For example, in response to criticism of having Buddhist monks in the program, the festival director of *Art Is…* organised a game of cricket between the monks and the other members of the local community. The game and subsequent media coverage went a long way to reducing local fears and suspicions some people had about the Monks.

The dilemmas can be created by contesting viewpoints is illustrated by the *Moon Lantern Festival* held on Richmond high-rise housing estate in Melbourne. This festival has drawn on some of the main features of a traditional Vietnamese Festival, but has also been strongly concerned with engaging a broad cross section of the diverse cultural communities represented on the estate. As Rosalie Hastwell who co-ordinates the Arts and Culture Program at the North Richmond Community Health Centre stated during an on-line forum I convened on celebrations in 2001.

> *In adapting this festival to become an inclusive, multicultural and contemporary event reflecting the mix and experiences and identities of the communities on the estate, and also perhaps in relying on artists from outside of those traditions to interpret and direct the festival, some [older Vietnamese and Chinese residents] feel that is has lost its deeper significance and clarity of connection to a valued set of traditional images and symbols and practices.*

> *How do we recognise/respect/reflect the traditions and significances attached to Moon Lantern by the more traditional members of these communities while also facilitating evolution towards a festival which strengthens understanding and participation across diverse cultures and sub-cultures?*

This is one of the challenges within the contemporary multi-cultural Australian context where 24% of the population were born overseas, more than half of these in non-English speaking countries (ABS, 2002c). There has been a great deal of community dialogue in the media in recent times about ethnic and religious differences. The following section further discusses how festivals can move beyond reinforcing difference as a negative concept but rather move to a place of unity where diversity is valued.

11.4 Fostering unity

> *On the last day of Olympics all the different countries, all the workers at the end of the marathon came together for the biggest party I have ever been part of. Hundreds of people from different countries, not one fight despite alcohol. It was really interesting watching this celebration which was so totally different from the competitiveness of the Olympics itself. When we come together with truly open hearts there is no conflict* (workshop participant Marrickville leadership project, 2003).

Generally I observed limited genuine cross-cultural community exchange between ethnic or other cultural groups. This can be attributed in part to the festival formats where events or activities were planned for the separate groups. This reinforced 'difference' between ethnic communities as people were not provided with opportunities to engage in 'whole of community' activities.

Multiculturalism has been critiqued for its lack of focus on fostering a shared view or experience of what we have in common. As Tacey notes "its ethic is based on mutual tolerance of those who remain Other and outside our own experience (2000, p. 245)." He asks,

> beyond economic considerations what is there to bind us all together? What myths and symbols do we share that foster respect for each other and for a common set of ideals? The new public story will go beyond the fact of our plurality to discover a common stock of shared meanings (p. 245). The new unity will have to be inclusive rather than exclusive, fluid and permeable rather than fixed and unchanging, celebrating our continued diversity yet recognising the essential unity that links us all (p. 246).

Valuing diversity and being able to develop common values and shared visions for the community is a key feature of learning communities (Kilpatrick, 2001). However, how do we arrive at these shared values? Whose voices are heard? I believe community celebrations can provide spaces for dialogue to take place not only for what is shared in common, but our diversity. But I make a distinction between active and passive dialogue. While the 'spaghetti and polka' format may be an active process for the community representatives who are sharing their dances, music and food it was often a passive process for other festival participants (ie they sit and watch or at best try out the food). The lack of common engagement perpetuates perceptions of difference. This limits the potential for bridging capital to be created.

Several organisers expressed a genuine interest in creating collective experiences. For example, the multicultural worker in the festivals team at CERES explained that,

> *In my role I want to create pathways for involvement, and this is very important to create possibilities for people from diverse cultures to come together and share their stories, values, traditions and skills. This is not about assimilation but about strengthening communities through diversity.*

While the festival director of Big West explained:

> *Big West is interested in cross-cultural connections and to engage with new aspects of others to develop a new sense of identity...a new shared*

identity…We are not against continuing old traditions but are interested in fostering new traditions.

The 2000 *Sydney Olympics Torch Relay* was an interesting example of a 'uniting' celebration that enabled communities to 'tailor' their local events. As reported in the online Olympic Post Games Report the torch relay was within a one-hour drive of 85 percent of the population, travelled over 270,000 kms and was carried by 11,000 local torchbearers in the longest torch relay in Olympic history. The following extracts from the Olympic Post Games Report illustrate the diversity of ways people celebrated the relay coming to their town and the sense of unity it created across the country.

> The torch kindled a kinship and ignited a spirit of unity.
>
> The Olympic flame travelled by a variety of modes of transport, including a surf boat at Bondi, the Indian Pacific train across the Nullabor Plain, a Royal Flying Doctor Service aircraft in the remote outback and by camel on Cable Beach at Broome in the north-west of the country. The journey began at Uluru, in the centre of Australia. For some who couldn't afford to go to Sydney for the *Olympics* it was their chance to be involved and have a memory of the event.
>
> Each community placed their own stamp on the relay. There was the light-hearted breast-stroke in the sand, desert golf, others lined the streets with balloons and flags, cited their own specially composed poems and listened to the sounds of a didgeridoo, children's activities (including a performance mentally disabled children). In Port Arthur they held a one-minute silence for those killed in the 1996 massacre. In Griffith more than 200 paid tribute to regions rich agricultural history, carrying lanterns representing the fruit and vegetables grown in the area.
>
> Time and time again, stories of courage were shared by other torchbearers fighting physical disease or other traumas such as Edna Malone, who made her way to the community cauldron through a colourful see of 60000 hands 'planted' as a symbol of Reconciliation in the nearby town of Cherbourg.
>
> Wombat a tiny town between Young and Cootamundra with 120 citizens was not scheduled to be visited by the flame. The residents decided to deliver their message of peace by releasing a dozen white doves as the convoy passed. In recognition of this gesture the organisers arranged to have one of the miner's lamps which protected the 'mother flame'

make a quick stop in Wombat in addition to its scheduled visits before the evening celebration in Cowra.

Ballina declared a half-day public holiday for the evening celebration. Grafton decorated itself with 42km of purple crepe paper. In Port Macquarie, Stephen Lyons who was born with no legs and one arm, carried the torch. Like most torchbearers, he wanted to keep his torch as a souvenir, so his friends brought it for him.

It was World Reconciliation Day when the torch went through Bega Valley. There were no planned Aboriginal torchbearers so a local torchbearer gave away his position to run in Candelo to a 17 year old Koori from Bega, in a simple statement supporting Reconciliation.

Further north, as the torch relay left the city of Wollongong, 100 Harley Davidson motorbike riders made a corridor through which the torchbearer ran.

Eighty six year old Lola Harding Irmer, choreographer of young gymnasts and member of the 1936 games in Berlin gave a performance by dancing on Oxford street while carrying the torch. Thousands of people mostly from the gay community, joined in the performance by chanting LOL-A. A huge burst of glittery tape was sprinkles over the crowd and the song LOLA by the Kinks was played loudly over speakers.

Large format TV screens at Circular Quay and other city Live Site locations kept the million spectators informed of the whereabouts of the Olympic flame and the identity of the torchbearers.

So many held barbecue breakfasts along the routes. At Collaroy Heights War veterans Retirement Village, residents spent months making banners, rugs and life-size papier-mâché mascots to celebrate the day. One nearby resident had planted a floral display of pansies in the colours and shape of the Olympic rings in her garden.

In Queensland and elsewhere many torchbearers would later take their torches to youth detention centres, nursing homes and schools to share them with others.

However, the Torch Relay while creating a common experience did not consciously foster dialogue and cross-cultural understanding. Other celebrations I studied deliberately sought to foster active cross cultural exchanges. For example, the *Carnarvon Youth and Children's Festival* was used by health authorities to bring together children and young people from across the community - Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, Vietnamese, Portuguese. *Cooking Stories* was a writing project that

resulted in a collection of stories and objects that revealed the experiences about the refugee journey and the process of settling in a new home. It sought to challenge the public story that refugees are 'queue jumpers' taking the place of their relatives who wanted to migrate. Dinners were hosted between new and more established refugee communities. Hearing the personal experience of the newer refugees enabled the more established refugee communities to reflect on their own experiences and to have points of comparison and even revise some of their opinions. Opportunities such as these are important as often racism is only identified between the dominant Anglo and non-English speaking groups.

Processes are needed for community to emerge.

> Community evolves as people develop a sense of being appreciated, of belonging, of deeply caring and being cared for. Community is inspired by collaboration, sharing beliefs in the present and mutual hopes for the future (Whitney 1995, p. 200).

Community for Jon Hawkes (2002) is not an object but a sensation - the sensation of sharing, of belonging, of connectedness, of common cause. While O'Dea believes:

> When we shift our awareness toward an appreciation of our deep relatedness, we begin at the very least to transform structures that feed off separation and division (2005, p. 571).

Weaving a common story is powerful. As Elizabeth Reid notes, this was used effectively by the women's movement.

> It provided women with an alternative sense of identity and membership in a new and different world. Its use led to the recognition of diversity and the acceptance of difference amongst women. It promoted a sense of oneness in diversity and so contributed to the formation of trust and respect. It did not destroy women's vertical patriarchal, bureaucratic or political linkages but created a new horizontal one, directly women to women. Women began to think of women as 'we'. It made possible the emergence of a sense of solidarity, which is a precondition for collective action and social change (1997, p. 3).

Only a few organisers sought to draw on common experiences from people around the world to create a new hybrid festival that also provided a shared experience. The earth provides a powerful symbol of unity as it is something we are all share and are

connected to. The *Nati Frinj Space and Place* performance shifted beyond traditional divisions by sharing stories and images about the land and seasons from a range of perspectives including Aboriginal people, farmers and climbers.

> *It brought in the farming side. It meant a lot more to us when they said a lot about the farming side, the land* (farmer on the Space and Place performance at the Natimuk silos).

Thus unity can be fostered by an ecological approach which recognises that we are interconnected to each other and this planet. Unity can also be fostered by recognising that what we have in common is our 'humanness' - that we share the same biology and emotional lives. Within this, valuing individual expression or uniqueness recognises diversity as an asset. Such an approach of valuing unity and diversity requires us to create new rituals and celebrations in response. *Earth Dance* (see www.earthdance.org) is one simple celebration that has this aim. It uses dance to do so. It encourages all people around the world to dance for peace on the same day to the same song. The USA fire circles mentioned earlier do this by providing a dedicated space for all involved to co-create through the arts in playful but sacred way.

Given festivals and celebrations are so prolific I would suggest organisers need to reflect on how the formats and process they adopt are valuing diversity and unity or are they inadvertently fostering division and tensions. I would suggest that celebrations that value diversity do not simply accept the traditional multicultural festival model but rather embrace a broader one that recognises that valuing diversity is about acknowledging the unique assets of *all* members of a community. Hence, they will be inclusive and foster exchanges between all sub-communities and not just selected groups. They will also value diversity of creative expression that enables people to share their own experiences and understandings of life and wellbeing as they unfold during their lifespan. And in context to the past and future and the earth on which we live. In doing so, they will enable a unified story to emerge.

This is captured in a documentary, *The Gathering* (www.whaledreamers.com) where elders from around the world gathered in Australia to support the Mirning Aboriginal

community who had been displaced from their traditional lands reclaim their cultural heritage. The documentary shows how the gathering provided an opportunity for people to share their experiences, the anger over past injustices and trauma, and the divisions between the communities. It also provided a sacred or 'special' space for people who had been ignored to be seen, for elders from many traditions to share their knowledge and practices. It also showed the power of ceremony as a form of healing and as a way of initiating people into community leadership roles. Further, it provided a platform and process for the many people present from all over the world to experience a sense of solidarity or 'oneness' by recognising that they all shared concerns about the environmental destruction that was occurring to the planet and indigenous cultures and were united in caring for the planet earth for future generations.

This documentary profiled both their disempowering and empowering experiences. The next chapter examines issues of power in greater depth and how this impacts on the degree to which celebrations can be transformative experiences.

Chapter 12: Oppressive and Transformative Celebrations

> If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution (Emma Goldman, bumper sticker).

During the planning of a celebration and the celebration itself, power can be accessed, accepted, negotiated, resisted and reinforced. Movies and television shows thrive on depicting such power struggles, particularly within personal contexts. For example, in an episode of 'Friends', a popular American sitcom, the character of Pheobe took up an offer from her friend Monica to help her organise her wedding. During the course of the episode Monica turned into a 'nazi wedding planner' and proceeded to enforce her desire for an increasingly elaborate wedding. Phoebe was eventually forced to 'sack her' in order to have the simple ceremony she wanted.

Power can be many things - it can be overt or covert, subtle or blatant, hidden or exposed (Prilleltensky, forthcoming a). Isaac Prilleltensky and Geoff Nelson define three uses of power:

1. power to strive for well-being;
2. power to oppress; and
3. power to resist marginalisation and strive for liberation (2002, p. 7).

The exercise of power can apply to self, others, and collectives. Prilleltensky acknowledges that "power and interests are difficult to determine because there are unconscious subjective forces as well as socially constructed interests that are hard to disentangle" (forthcoming a). Thus, whereas people may be oppressed in one context, at a particular time and place, they may act as oppressors at another time and place. Structural factors such as social class, gender, ability, and race, influence the levels of power people exercise. Degrees of power are also affected by personal and social constructs such as beauty, intelligence, and assertiveness; constructs that have distinct status within different cultures.

The following questions can help analyse potentially contesting forces and interests within a celebration context:

- *who leads* and controls the celebration?
- *who participates?* - who is supported to participate, who is excluded either deliberately or inadvertently? - whose voices are heard?
- *who and what is valued and how?*
- *what language and symbols are used?* – how does this include or exclude?
- *how* is the celebration 'program' planned and facilitated? – how conscious a process is this?

The following draws on celebrations to illustrate how different celebrations can oppress or be transformative.

12.1 Oppressive celebration

Prilleltensky (forthcoming b) defines oppression as

> asymmetric power relations characterised by domination, subordination and resistance, whereby the controlling person or group exercise their power by processes of political exclusion and violence and by psychosocial dynamics of depreciation.

Bell (1992) reviewed anthropological research up to that point and highlighted how ceremony, ritual and celebrations were viewed as instruments of social control used by the dominant group to sustain and legitimise its power base. The most prevalent analytical perspective sees power as external and ceremony, ritual and celebrations are viewed as instruments of power to create social solidarity, channel conflict and/or shape peoples views of reality, their perceptions, values and assumptions. Bell argues that ritual can be an effective strategy for social control, particularly in closed societies with hierarchical structures. Power in this instance is about the domination of a person or group by another person through coercion and/or consent.

Ritual and ceremony has been used throughout history to reinforce particular religious and political ideologies (Wolin and Bennet, 1984). Prilleltensky (forthcoming a)

argues that, external oppression deprives individuals or groups of the benefit of personal (self-determination) collective (distributive justice) and relational (democratic participation) wellbeing. This is evidenced in celebration practices that exclude people and deny their participation. For example, denying same-sex couples access to marriage. Only 30 years ago, Australian federal laws forbade Aboriginal people to engage in traditional cultural practices. Today, this still exists in less subtle forms. I sat on the VicHealth Communities Together assessment panel and there were applications from communities wishing to celebrate the founding of their town. But few applications acknowledged the Aboriginal heritage of the region.

Using celebration to oppress is often a subtle process. Celebrations can support myths which individuals and communities grow to believe. These myths, while true for one group can disguise other experiences. The Australian myth of 'mateship and a fair go,' for example, persists despite this not being the everyday reality and experiences of many individuals and communities[24]. *Anzac Day* draws on and reinforces the myth of mateship annually. Political parties draw on these myths through celebration to reinforce their particular policies. For example, the 2003 military street parade to welcome back troops from Iraq can be viewed as engendering community support for this particular type of foreign policy.

In chapter five I discussed how legal controls are increasingly influencing how people gather and engage in public celebrations. Organisations and groups are now almost always required to partner with large agencies such as local government authorities to meet public liability and insurance requirements. One impact has been the increase in decision making power held by large organisations, and individuals within them. Cameron raises the concern that contemporary events are being "hijacked by individuals and organisations devoted to financial profit or other types of exploitative activity" (2004, p. 103). This concern was expressed by interviewees about both business and government bodies. In particular, there was concern about local government planning festivals largely for tourism purposes and having little

[24] According to the Australian Council of Social Services poverty is a relative concept used to describe the people in society that cannot participate in the activities that most people take for granted. ACOSS estimates that two million people live in poverty today in Australia - one in ten Australians (based on a poverty live of 50% of average disposable income as used in the UK and Europe) (2005)

understanding or concern about community development. The consequence of this is to favour support for professional rather than volunteer run festivals.

Funding agencies too, increasingly influence the celebration agenda. VicHealth's funding scheme is one that favours community owned celebrations for the most disadvantaged and marginalised. But even within these parameters the notion of 'community owned' begs the question, 'what is community?' Non-government organisations like to claim they represent community. However, non-government organisations sometimes represent a narrow range of community interests. Often celebrations were driven by the interests of a small core group of local artists and community workers some of whom had particular agendas they wished to pursue.

Oppression is not always external but can be internal and this can lead to the partial or complete rejection of one's own reference group. For example, it is not uncommon for Aboriginal elders to comment on how young people do not value traditional cultural ways. Paulo Freire (1970) refers to 'internalisation of the oppressed,' a process whereby individuals and communities are subliminally persuaded to worldviews and self images that serve interests counter to their own.

The media has played a significant role in shaping people's views of themselves and others. For example, the way women are portrayed has contributed to the negative view many women have of their bodies. While the focus of media attention on terrorism has fostered a culture of fear. Increasingly, people view freedom in terms of consumer choice rather than in the sense of how they engage in society.

12.2 Transformative celebrations

> … it is timely that we give thanks for
> The lives of all prophets, teachers, healers and
> revolutionaries, living and dead, acclaimed or
> obscure, who have rebelled, worked and suffered for
> the cause of love and joy.
> We also celebrate that part of us, that part within
> Ourselves, which has rebelled, worked and suffered

> For the cause of love and joy.
> We give thanks and celebrate.
>
> (Leunig 2004, no page number listed)

The importance of having control over ones health is seen as an essential element of well being. Having a sense of control may involve seeking liberation from oppression. At an individual level this may be taking control over one's internal fears and obsessions. At a collective level it may include liberation from such things as class exploitation, gender and ethnic discrimination.

The role of the arts in inspiring action on social justice was noted by Williams (1996). The celebrations I examined in Victoria focused on marginalised groups such as refugees, homeless, people living in low socio-economic areas and those with disabilities. I spoke with several festival organisers who viewed festivals as opportunities for meaningful cultural and artistic experiences that explore issues of concern. A former manager of the *Big West Festival* acknowledged the untapped potential of festivals in this regard. Jane Miskovic the choreographic director of the East Timor independence celebration stated.

> The whole experience has brought home to me that performance and creative arts are political and economic and social, and we can express powerful ideas through them in a very moving way (2002).

This is also the case for some broader community celebrations such as NAIDOC week which has its origins in protest. While it has since evolved more into a celebration recognising the contributions Aboriginal people make to contemporary Australia for some the role it plays as protest is still important. An Aboriginal health worker commenting on *NAIDOC* celebrations[25] in the regional town of Ballarat said:

> *…we are still here and political issues still need to be addressed…We are part of the community and our voices need to be heard* (Aboriginal health worker, Ballarat).

[25] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

May Day and *Labour Day* celebrations which are still held annually recognise the union movements' commitment to an eight hour working day. Such celebrations regain currency when the issues they advocate for become under threat once again as for example, with the recent legislative changes to industrial relation laws in Australia.

As mentioned previously, at a national level reconciliation initiatives have been a process that has facilitated social healing by enabling the voices of Aboriginal people to be heard and by giving them a respectful, visible presence in community celebrations. The profiling of indigenous culture within the *2000 Sydney Olympic Games* ceremonies and festival program modelled this. The first and last bearers of the Olympic torch were Aboriginal sports women with one, Cathy Freeman also selected to light the flame. The *Festival of the Dreaming*, an indigenous arts festival was one of the three cultural events that preceded the *Olympic Games*. Others also took the opportunity the *Olympics* provided to make high profile statements. During the closing ceremony acts, members of the bands *Yothu Yindi* and *Midnight Oil* wore t-shirts saying 'sorry'. This was a reference to the Prime Ministers refusal to officially say sorry about what happened to the 'stolen generation' of Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their families. As Peter Kell commented, "It put the spotlight on reconciliation in a way that formal political activities have been unable to do" (2001, p. 76).

These examples also draw attention to the power of celebrations that encourage and enable researching and producing stories of ordinary people. A transformative approach begins with people's stories. At times it means contesting the way stories have been told and re-telling them from the perspective of 'ordinary' people. Celebrations are sites where people's stories can be shared. And it is these stories that can be used as tools for dialogue. Paulo Friere (1970, 1992) talked and wrote about the power of helping people to 'name their world' to created the conditions for critical dialogue. It is one thing for people to talk about issues they are unhappy about - be it prejudice and discrimination, unemployment, not enough for young people to do, mistrust between groups within a town, as just some examples of issues. It is another, to feel that one's voice will be heeded and that one has the capacity to do something about the issues. To be empowered as the latter implies is a necessary condition for

critical dialogue. But to 'teach' empowerment is, of course, challenging and complex. In fact, it can be said that empowerment cannot be taught, only learnt. Stories can enable people to describe the issues as they experience them, in other words, to 'name their world'. When celebrations instigate, support and showcase people's stories they are transforming not only 'insider's' perceptions of their own voice and situation but also that of 'outsiders'. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The concept of celebration as a site of collective liberation and learning is not a new one (Kelly and Kaplan, 1990, Kertzer, 1988). Historically celebrations have opened up spaces of deep play that allow for challenges to power. This is most evident in the work of Mikhael Bakhtin (1984a, 1984b), and more recently Waterman (1998). Like the role of the court jester in Shakespeare's plays, carnivals have been places where rules and protocols that are normally and ruthlessly enforced can be flouted. However, Bakhtin has argued they serve to reinforce oppression in the longer term as their ameliorative nature acts to release pent up tensions and frustrations experienced by the oppressed and from a Frierian perspective do little to raise consciousness. I would suggest only the minority of contemporary celebrations are truly transformative. As Hugh Mackay commented at the time in relation to the *Olympics*:

> And the euphoria of the *Olympic Games*…where did that go? I recall reading, just a week after Games ended, a Sydney train drivers account of friendly animated passengers, smiling and talking to each other, even on trains not going to the games. Yet as soon as the games ended, his passengers became the same old sullen mob, heads buried in their newspapers, avoiding eye contact (2001b, p. 37).

But there are few that are deliberately designed to be personally, let alone socially or politically transformative. Some include potentially transformative elements within broader programs. For example, the *Ouyen Rain-dance* was incorporated into a whole of community festival day. A contemporary example I believe that has had an overt agenda to liberate and that has achieved this, at least in part, is the *Sydney Mardi Gras*. Carberry comments how Mardi Gras is

> affirming the rights of homosexuals to take their place in society openly and without apology. Each year there are floats with an overtly political agenda (1995, p. 1).

> Today the Mardi Gras parade and the month long festival that precedes it provides opportunities to highlight contemporary political issues such as HIV/AIDS, anti-vilification, anti-violence measures, adoption, benefits for same sex partners and religious intolerance (Carbery 1995, p. 2).

Festivals such as *Sydney Mardi Gras* challenge dominant values, educate people about social systems, who is included and excluded, and who holds power. It gave voice to many in the community who were marginalised and oppressed - gays, lesbians, transgender and HIV positive individuals. *Sydney Mardi Gras*' ability to go beyond supporting personal transformation such as providing a supportive context for someone to 'come out' about their sexuality is that it has contributed to wider community dialogue over time. It has done this both visually during the course of the parade as well as through the popular media. Each year both criticism and praise of the *Sydney Mardi Gras* is covered in the media. Small numbers of people demonstrate each year at the parade, but popular approval has been on the side of *Sydney Mardi Gras*. This is not always the case for all festivals. The 2002 *Adelaide Festival* was an example where one of Australia's most prestigious arts festivals sought to engage local marginalised groups and give them a voice. The festival director was drawing on traditions of community cultural development. As discussed at the 2002 Art of Dissent Conference this led to protest by others who expected a more traditional approach. Subsequently the artistic director resigned.

Celebrations can be a symbol of resistance. Celebrations have the potential to initiate or maintain social change by providing safe spaces for people to engage in dialogue. The role of story and other creative processes in celebrations will be explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter 13: Celebrations, Creativity and Mythopoesis

> In an age where art has become decorative and lost in spiritual meaning, in an age where medicine has lost its connection to the heart and the intuitive spirit and healing can be reunited through ritual to become one again…Art and ritual are the doorways into the realm of the heart, the tool for transformation… (Samuels 2005, p. 138).

Parker, Radha and Horton (1996) discuss how traditional ritual integrates elements that access some or all of the five senses - touch, smell, sight, hearing, taste. Grimes (2000) believes that ritual may have been the original multi-media performance. The following discusses several experiential activities people may engage in during a celebration that can stimulate these senses and open up opportunities to access other forms of intuitive body based knowing.

Such an approach seeks personal transformation, at a physiological, cognitive and biological level. We are no longer the same. Grimes says of ritual:

> they exist in the moments of their enactment and then disappear. When effective, their traces remain - in the heart, in the memory, in the mind, in the texts, in photographs, in descriptions, in social values, and in the marrow, the source of our lifeblood (2000, p. 7).

Many of us living in the Western culture live our lives in our heads, constantly thinking. We have become proficient at using the logical, left side of our brains. This is reflected even with our priorities for celebrations on the logistics of celebrations, risk management and economic gains. We are losing the 'Art of Celebrating' where we explore the poetic possibilities of life. Celebration can help people to take inward journeys. They can shift our focus from our heads to feel more with our hearts and to provide a space to access the right side of our brain - the creative side. It values the knowledge and wisdom we can gain through our bodies through the visual arts, music and movement. By doing so we seek wholism, rather than simply operating from one part of ourselves. We allow for community to come together and to share stories, to weave us into a bigger picture. It is also a space for where the new can emerge. A space for nonlinear interactions and synchronicities. Those celebrations that allowed

something to come into being that was more than the sum of the parts had an extra sense of vibrancy and connectedness.

13.1 Creativity

> Ritual was once a communal telling of story in most imaginative ways. So many places in the West there either is no ritual or what passes for it is rote, mechanical, law based and dull. It does not arouse or lead to ecstasy. It does not touch the heart but remains so often in the head. No imagination is allowed (Fox, 2000).

> Festivals have the very best shot of collecting ideas and thoughts and people's imaginations and celebrating that (Lindy Hume as reported by Lawson, 2003).

The power of creativity for personal development and collective wellbeing is well recognised (Arts Victoria 2003, VicHealth, 2003c and see Runco, 2004 for a summary of the research). It is an essential part of both play and ritual. Creativity is often expressed through a range of artistic art forms. Ealy (1995) suggests that by exercising creativity in one part of life, it begins to flourish in other areas.

The community celebrations I examined provided spaces to be creative and try things out at both the individual, organisational and community level. Many festivals incorporated experiential activities either in the lead up to or on the day of the celebration. This led to the production of a wide range of creative cultural products. For example:

- Visual arts and crafts such as painting, photography, exhibitions, weaving, carving, murals, sculptures, jewellery, felt making, book making, drawing, pottery, body painting, banners, wearable art, puppetry, billy-carts, quilting, kites, scarecrows
- Food and arts markets
- Games and play activities including cubbies, drama, circus, food games
- Performance pieces such as especially created performances or theatre pieces, or concerts of existing local groups, workshops leading to performance, competitions, storytelling and poetry, circus, comedy, puppetry

- Music including bands, rhythm workshops, silence, song, learning to play an instrument
- Dance including, bush dances, organic dancing, traditional dancing from a variety of cultures, trance dance
- Parades including the whole of community or selected groups
- Story making via visual presentations, public speaking, debates and film
- Feasts
- Rituals
- Ceremony - both simple and elaborate
- Healing activities: for individuals such as meditation classes and group healing through reconciliation initiatives

People described how these were positive experiences.

> *It was a great experience learning to gum boot dance* (student, Art Is…).
>
> *Best experience some of these young people ever had* (teacher, Horsham on the Slap Happy percussion initiative with local young people).
>
> *For me it was a new experience as I have never been in a choir. You felt part of it. I was able to contribute* (senior resident, Natimuk).
>
> *You don't have to be an expert…just have a go… fosters atmosphere where any talents can come forth and people will help you* (business owner, Horsham).
>
> *We found a lot of people came along and actually physically got involved in this art stuff (tiles, posts, wood turning, puppet workshop, face painting, juggling balls)* (organiser, Dunolly Heart and Soul).

The positive spaces created often inspired other unplanned activities,

> …*we had a spontaneous dance party* (resident, Natimuk).

> *…people over the road from the bush dance had an open BBQ. Over 80 people rocked up* (volunteer co-ordinator, Carisbrook).

The importance of people having opportunities to be creative was repeatedly noted, particularly by those living in rural areas.

Humour was a popular feature of activities. For example, the young people at the *Flying Feathers Festival* in Euroa held doona and washing races to challenge gender stereotypes. There were examples where people were invited to take the activities they developed elsewhere. For example, the *Space and Place* performance within *Nati Frinj* was taken up by the *Regional Arts Festival* held in Horsham.

The creativity generated by a celebration got people thinking about other creative things their town could do. People who tried something during a festival and liked it sought further opportunities.

> *I was approached by the local foundry owner who has offered to cut up public sculptures for the Council* (community worker, Horsham).

> *I approached local businesses recently to put in local artworks. Over 100 said yes…easier because of their prior experiences with Art Is…* (artist, Horsham).

As Jon Hawkes recognises, "creativity is our channel to mysterious places larger than ourselves, to 'bring into being'" (2002, p. 7). This creative process can be empowering and even transformative when it leads to insight and learning. Or as one festival organiser said, "when creativity is generated between people, *'magic happens'*. Some communities have greater creative capacity from the outset. Natimuk is one example of a 'creative community'. Richard Florida (2003) when studying why some communities prosper while others don't found that there is a correlation between concentrations of creative populations. And Florida found the concentrations came about through a snow-ball process whereby creative people attracted more creative people. The capacity of the Natimuk community to create and stage a large-scale performance was exceptionally high, particularly for a rural community of 500 people. This is in part due to it being located next to Mt Arapelies

which is the number one climbing destination in Australia. There is a group of climbers who have chosen to live in the area, many of whom are also professional artists and aerial performers. Natimuk is also located near Horsham where the *Art Is…* festival is held and both supports and is supported by *Art Is…* and the local community development worker based at Horsham. Other communities develop their creative capacity over time. This was one of the aims of the *Melbourne Fringe Festival* partnering with the Atherton Estate. *The Melbourne Fringe* has supported the estate to form their own arts committee and to develop systems to cope with arts projects coming onto the site in the future.

In the following sections I will describe and discuss how various dimensions of creative processes in celebrations can foster health and wellbeing.

13.2 Celebration as mythopoesis

> Giving voice to Earth's voice has been a specific task since the beginning, according to the stories we tell ourselves, the songs we sing, our rituals and our poetry. Repetition, rhythm, rhyme, patterns of gesture, movement and language: these are the ways we speak out and give coherence to experience, assert our connection with everything else. These repetitive, echoing forms of speech and movement shape meaning out of randomness, mimic and embody the cyclic, interdependent processes that create and maintain life on Earth - the web we are part of. In place of the linear time of mortality, dance and poetry eat out a circular measure, keep time with the world (Suzuki and McConnell 1997, p. 200-201).

Emile Durkheim (1971) considered rituals as thought in/as action. While Joseph Campbell once said, "…by participating in ritual we experience a mythological life" (1988, p. 182). Thus, celebrations are vehicles for expression and the embodiment of ideas. This is the realm of mythopoesis. Celebrations can be seen as a form of, and space for, myth -creating, -making and -actioning. Celebrations can provide an opportunity to explore and express what is in people's hearts and in their bodies by drawing on the creative, the playful, and the personally meaningful. Often on this journey people find they have to overcome personal and communal challenges such as learning to express themselves through story, song, music or dance. These forms of activity are integral in connecting us together with each other and the places where we

live. Stories are often multidimensional. They can conceal the truth in myth (Saunders, 2003).

13.3 Story making and telling

> It is the sharing of stories - the opening of windows into our own and others' lives - that shows us how like others we are in our needs and yearnings, as well as the ways in which each of us is unique and entirely special (Dowrick 2006b, p. 57).

The relationship between celebration and myth can be viewed at a number of levels. Firstly, we create our own myths or internal mental models about what a particular celebration looks and will feel like. For example, the organisers of *Woodford Folk Festival* promote the concept of a People's Republic of Woodford, a community that lives in peace and harmony with each other and the land. Each year, a pledge is made to this at the opening ceremony. Secondly, celebrations can become part of the mythology about a community of interest such as the family, the school, our town. Compan, Moreno, Ruiz and Pascual found within the family context:

> Celebrations with the extended family, for example, are an important source of information providing family histories and modelling conflict resolution; stories of the parents as children, or how an uncle or grandfather may have overcome some particular difficulty (2002, p. 4).

Thirdly, community celebrations I examined provided an opportunity for people to create dialogue and to challenge contemporary myths. The story of the Natimuk football team, a team who had experienced a long-term losing streak, was depicted in a documentary *Rams to Slaughter.* It was produced by one of the players who was also a local resident and climber. It showed the emotional importance of football and how it fostered relationships between the football players, many of whom were local farmers, and the transient climbers living in town. This re-positioned the climbers as contributors to the local community and the footballers as committed and resilient, and not 'losers'. The choice of *Art is Freedom* theme coincided with the Tampa crises and sought to challenge misunderstandings people held about refugees. The Tampa crises occurred on August 26, 2001 when the captain of the Tampa, a

Norwegian tanker took aboard 438 refugees from a sinking wooden vessel. The Australian Government refused to allow the asylum seekers to land on Australian territory.

A similar theme was adopted for the 2002 *Kingfisher Festival* where the focus was on migration. The migration stories of the Kingfisher, a migratory bird and totem for the CERES site, was linked to the migration experiences of refugees. The 'audience' participated by moving through the site and experiencing the migration experience including the experience of going through border control and then watching a multimedia performance involving artists, school children and other community members sharing refugee stories.

There are stories that re-define local mythologies about place. The suburb of Eagleby in the city of Brisbane used celebration to change people's stories and experiences of space and the local park in particular. The celebration challenged existing prejudices about the park being too dangerous to use. It reclaimed the space and highlighted what is possible (Sarkissian, 2001).

Fourthly, celebrations can (re)engage with traditional myths. For example, the *Sydney Dreaming Festival* integrated traditional stories with contemporary art forms through the re-telling of traditional Dreaming stories. The *CERES Autumn Harvest Festival* draws on traditional mythologies from around the world to create a new collective one based around communal feasting - cooking and sharing of food. Finally, celebrations can support people to dream, imagine and be inspired.

Myth is essentially 'whole' stories. The health and wellbeing benefits of storytelling are widely acclaimed (see Williams, Labonte and O'Brien, 2003 for a summary). Story telling is used in multiple ways within the celebration context. It can be used to empower people around their own sense of agency and collective capacity. At the personal level, each person has a narrative that emerges from their life experiences which the process of celebrating draws on and adds to. Within the therapeutic context ritual and celebration are used as part of narrative work with individuals and families (Morgan, 2000). In both therapeutic use of story and within community cultural development traditions, a person or community centred approach is adopted. These

are approaches that see people as experts about their own lives and draws on their assets to address problems and issues (Morgan, 2000; Adams and Goldard, 2001). Both approaches seek to increase individual agency where people become aware of their own power. Through exploring one's own story an individual can gain consciousness about the multidimensional nature of their lives and, where they have come from, and the possibilities of who they can be.

While the power of story telling lies in allowing for people to become aware of and have their personal narrative heard, it can also allow for a collective voice to be discovered, for individuals to see themselves as part of an ever widening community. The importance of community story is supported by psychologists such as Martin Seligman (2002) and, Elizabeth Thomas and Julian Rappaport. They discuss how

> shared narratives that people tell again and again about their own and other communities are instrumental in maintaining these communities and in shaping the way that people think about themselves in these communities (1996, p. 320).

The main communication medium for our community(s) stories in contemporary times is the media, and in particular, television. I believe celebrations can provide opportunities to present alternatives to the dominant themes such as fear, violence, conflict and consumerism so widely depicted in the media.

Eckersley believes that the lack of meaning many young people are experiencing in Australia is a result of lack of story making, one that fits our modern context. He argues that

> all societies need visions or stories that embody their values and goals, and define who their people are, what they believe and where they want to go (2004, p. 125).

He goes on to cite the work of Hugh Mackay

> who said of Australia in 1997 that what seems to be lacking is a 'guiding story' that connects leaders and people. A set of coherent values and beliefs, imaginatively couched, that gives us a framework for making sense of our lives and, indeed, for taking more confident steps towards control of our destiny (2004, p. 125).

Such a process however, recognises that there is rarely one single meta-narrative but many different and sometimes contesting stories. This can be illustrated by a case study of festivals in the New South Wales town of Wauchope. Changes in the town's demography - from a homogeneous, conservative, agricultural community to a more diverse, service-orientated community, led to tensions between the older and newer community residents. Notably, the Aboriginal community had been re-located from the region many years previously. In Wauchope, a town of only 8,000 people, there were several festivals but each was driven by a particular sub-section of the community. For example, the old loggers and timber industry supported the *Timbertown Steam Festival*. A group of newer residents, a substantial number of whom were artists had organised an arts festival. The original intent of the arts festival was to protest the re-development of a local hall which was to be replaced with a car park, which subsequently occurred. Over time this group expressed interest in supporting a more 'whole of community' festival. Discussions facilitated by the Centre for Popular Education at the University of Technology in Sydney led to a festival program that focused around Bago mountain, a very visible landmark in the area. It was, and continues to be, used by many of the differing sub-communities for both recreation and economic purposes. However, no one seemed to know the history of the mountain (Aboriginal or contemporary). Subsequently people's stories about the mountain - old, young, visitors, community people, timber workers, and national parks officers were collected and a community dinner held where these stories were shared through performance. It was identified as the first time so many people from across the community had come together from a wide cross-section of the community in a meaningful and respectful way. Morgan Schatz-Blackrose, Co-ordinator of *Bago Stories* wrote:

> *The act of listening to the stories of others, particularly those people with differing points of view entertains the possibility of future dialogue, understanding and sometimes healing, if there are rifts within the community. This was the case at the Community Spirit Dinner where people of differing social and political persuasions were not only gathered together at the same event, but were given another way of seeing and relating to each other* (2004).

13.3.1 Naming the world through story

Elizabeth Reid (1997) believes the power of stories is in their 'personal connection'. Hearing the stories of others connects with our own experiences of life. She asserts that story telling was the foundation of the women's movement who were invited to share stories in non-judgemental ways. In a typical women's group, the women would share their personal stories. They listened to others' experiences.

> For the women telling their stories, the confessional moments of sharing these stories were transformative, a stepping out of a self and a setting constructed by others, the start of a journey towards becoming who they are, towards allowing themselves to grow…For the listeners this symphony of voices was a way of understanding complexity and differences, for constructing a holistic understanding (Reid 1997, p. 4).

The process of naming one's experiences can be profound especially when one has had a history of exclusion and alienation. To name the experience is the first step to analyse and possibly change them. But how can one help people name their struggles? It is here that Paulo Freire (1970, 1992) suggested that the role of an educator is to help the disempowered to 'name their world'. Popular educators immerse themselves in communities and learn what particular themes and issues matter to them. They also learn what language people in these communities use to name their world. They do this by using trigger materials in the form of pictures and artwork. The power of the spoke word in harming or healing is also recognised by health workers (Parker, Radha and Shelton, 1996).

An analogy can be drawn between Freire's (1970, 1992) idea of a popular educator and a celebration organiser who helps a community research, devise and perform a story. The celebration organiser, like the popular educator, helps the community describe and articulate their experiences. They use creative triggers to help personal stories to be shared. The use of theatre by Ecoliving, an environmental centre illustrates this.

> *Ecoliving I've found that many people might best be characterised as "doers" not "talkers". Reluctant to talk about themselves, or even, heaven*

forbid, publicly assert their beliefs. I see the importance of celebratory practices, rituals, processions, as the way for gentle but clear articulation of ideas about achievements and visions to be allowed to find their way into the public domain. That is why Playback theatre[26] *is less about theatrical spectacle and more about giving permission to audience members to tell their own true stories about their achievements, and have it affirmed and celebrated by skilled actors in an immediate and spontaneous manner* (celebration co-ordinator, Ecoliving).

13.4 Symbols

Celebrations utilise symbolic forms of communication and can themselves be seen as a symbolic expression. Individual symbols, be they words or material objects, are often interwoven into celebrations and in doing so, draw on pre-existing understandings or relationships people hold about them. New relationships can be established with symbols, or existing ones re-defined. For example, symbols are used to illustrate how people connect with local places and natural or man-made icons.

Symbols provide communication at all levels. They enable the individual to access differing forms of knowing within themselves - intuitively as well as cognitively. They can also facilitate communication between people and groups, between people and the broader ecosystem. The power of celebrations and their symbolic words, actions and experiences can be found in their ability to communicate in a powerful way, often beyond what words can do on their own. The power of memorials such as crosses by the roadside as ways of remembering people and events is depicted by Maria Tumarkin in her book Traumascapes (2006). A minute silence at a memorial service serves to unite people in 'deeper' reflection. Other examples include the lighting of a cauldron during the *Olympic Games* and the exchange of wedding rings. The pouring of water into a common pot was used in lieu of speeches as part of the opening ceremony of the *Splash Water Festival* held in Queensland. Such symbolic

[26] Playback theatre is improvised performance by a small group who enact out stories provided by the audience. (See www.playbacktheatre.com.au)

acts connect with our emotional selves. Dorothy McCrae-McMahon (2003) discusses how they are often something which people long remember.

Gift giving is often a core component of celebration although this can vary for differing cultural groups be they defined by ethnic, family or other ties. It can be a symbolic means of communication about the respect, appreciation and value placed on the relationship between people.

The ability of celebration and ritual to make visible cultural frameworks by using symbols was studied by Barbara Myerhoff.

> It may express deep contradictions in the social or cultural system - all kinds of trouble, uncertainties, conflicts and paradoxes. Or just the opposite, it may be designed to make these, to deny and discuses them and gloss the difficulties they present. It may be an act of affirmation, a declaration of structural strength, a presentation of apparent certainties continuity and the like. A ceremony may formulate, pattern or transform such materials; it may reiterate or present afresh ideas about social relationships, cultural or specific models, connecting them with universal personal experiences, linking or dividing, aggrandising or diminishing, blurring or clarifying (1977, p. 16).

Victor Turner suggests that one of the functions of symbols is to store and transmit information about society. He recognised that they can correspond "to a specific cluster of values, norms, beliefs, sentiments, social roles and relationships within the cultural system of the community performing the ritual" (O'Neil 2005, p. 51). Recognising this, Neil Cameron reflects in relation to the community festivals he directs: "The aim is to create a dense cultural environment which allows each member of the audience to take out of it what s/he will at whatever level" (2004, p. 52).

Several celebration practitioners I spoke with were aware that while shared understanding can exist for a particular symbol they are open to individual interpretation. As a result they facilitated processes that enabled both collective and individual interpretations. In describing how he has used the journey across a river to symbolise transformation Neil Cameron explains,

> each individual in the group creates her or his own personal symbolic language by making designs on the boat that convey feelings about transformation. The boat is then carried in

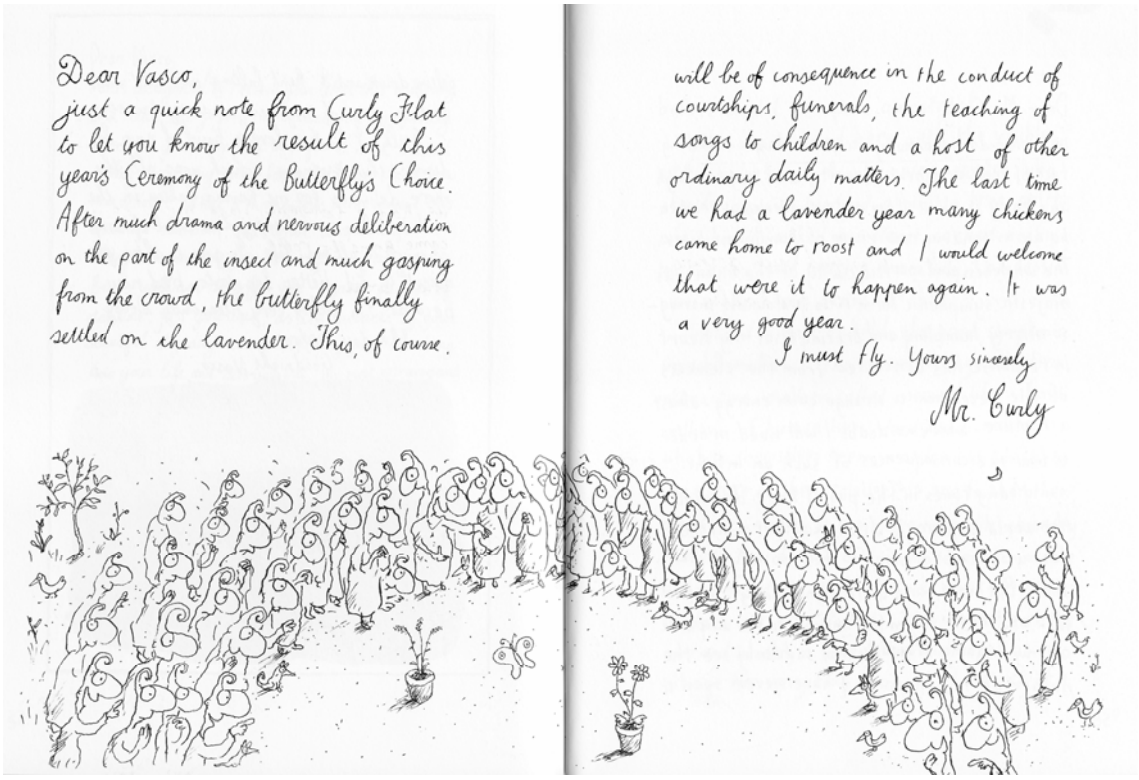
> the ritual by the group who made it. Symbolic unity is held by the boats and their journey but personal symbolism which has important meaning for the participant is allowed to function. A landscape is created to be inhabited by personal expression which might or might not be recognised by the audience. Ritual provides meaning where the audience is not asked to understand a metanarrative (some aspect of central truth) but rather the boats may mean many things, and each person brings his or her own meaning to the event (2004, p. 51).

13.5 Play

Play can be integrated into celebration in a variety of ways through informal spontaneous and imaginative activities, or more formalised ones such as competitive games. There is a long tradition of celebrations creating spaces for deeper forms of play, where there is serious intent behind their playfulness. This is perhaps best demonstrated in the traditions of Carnivale where otherwise socially unacceptable behaviours are permitted and the power relationships within communities are made more explicit (Bakhtin, 1984a, 1984b). Play's flexibility also contains within it the possibility of exploring new ways of doing things and as such can provide learning opportunities through creativity, innovation and questioning. Blatner and Blatner (1988) recognise this and also suggest that play has positive mental, social and cultural benefits.

Few celebrations I examined provided open opportunities for spontaneous play. Instead structured activities were the norm. This was the case even for children where frequently festivals provided a children's specific program within a broader program. The USA fire circles mentioned previously was the only opportunity I came across for an entire community to co-create and 'play' together through dance, rhythms and voice without a distinction being made between performers (or facilitator) and participants.

13.6 Ceremony and ritual



(Leunig 2001, p. 56-57)

The *Woodford Folk Festival* integrated ceremony and ritual throughout the festival in very accessible ways. This included the pledge of allegiance used at the opening ceremony and the opening and closing ceremonies themselves, which provided the context for the festival. The *Woodford Folk Festival's* welcome ceremony included opening words and ritual by traditional custodians of the land - the Dungidau people and acknowledgement of people who had passed on. Other activities included a whole-site candle holding and three minute silence on New Years Eve to share a time for universal prayer and wishes, and a sunrise ceremony on New Years day. The closing ceremony incorporated the traditional fire event and the Woodford choir.

The energy of collective patterns as well as the sense of connection with the familiar can be empowering. Many people expressed how they would return each year to particular festivals - it became an annual ritual. Although familiarity and tradition is important it is also essential that familiarity doesn't lead to the exclusion of people

and new ideas. This has been the problem Farmer notes with the major religions who have institutionalised their traditions.

> Coupled with an entrenched hierarchical organisational structure, this creates inherent limitations in risk taking and experimentation. This type of system discourages innovation, and holds on to the status quo at all costs. While this can instil a sense of predictability and security, all too often form takes precedence over substance, and new ideas and creative expression are suppressed (2002, p. 3).

Wheelock (in Myerhoff and Arbor, 1992) proposes that the primary purpose of ritualised language is to situate. Ritual is defined as different from routine in that there is a deeper degree of consciousness involved. Ceremony can be defined as a more formal activity while ritual is not always so. In discussing ritual in the health care context Dorothy McRae-McMahon said at a workshop I convened at Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney,

> *I believe to take a person into ritual in any environment is to invite them to dare to believe that they can live respectfully with themselves as ordinary 'bumbling' human beings… It can be of course about giving due respect to deep pain or grief, or sometimes it's a moment of celebration of something that is still there and perhaps a gathering around that person. It's sometimes about setting aside a special moment to stop and just stay with what we are feeling about ourselves in our health journey or our journey towards death. It's almost always a time at its best when a few people can gather around you and convince you that you're not alone and that you're gathered into the human community.*

Peter Willis (2002) discusses his experiences as a priest in the Kimberly region of Western Australia with aboriginal communities and how ritual can predispose people to learn, and learning can be used to deepen engagement in ritual. David Tacey acknowledges that for many indigenous cultures, "there were structures and initiation ceremonies designed to shift our lives from the surface to the depths" (2003b).

This idea that ritual facilitates a deeper level of consciousness has in the past been recognised as a transition between what Eliade (1968) named profane to sacred space.

For Livingstone sacred is defined "…as an awareness of deep relationship and identity with the very cosmic dynamics that create and sustain the universe. In this ritual deep relationship is able to be expressed and nurtured" (2002, p. 134). It moves learning beyond the cognitive level to a more conscious feeling level.

For many participants of the *Ouyen Rain-dance* and the *CERES Autumn Harvest Festival* this was their first experience of communal ritual. The resulting ritual was a more meaningful, deep and even sacred experience for the women and men involved than they expected.

> *What evolved was the belief in the overwhelming goodness of people and the ability of common belief to cause positive change. Being naked is a beautiful feeling encapsulating freedom and innocence, humbleness and earthy spirituality but the essence of the ceremony was not about being naked. It was about a common thread of hope and respect and saying we are here and ready to look after the land* (participant, Ouyen Rain-dance).

> *It has created a sense of sisterhood so that when people see each other in Ouyen, Mildura or Melbourne they give each other a hug. There is a sense they have participated in something special* (organiser, Ouyen Rain-dance).

This was also the experience for one volunteer at the CERES Autumn Harvest Festival.

> *I don't have a lot of ritual and ceremony in my life. I love to experience this celebratory aspect of the day. The rituals reinforce what I believe in - my values. When you are a minority you need this, because you can feel isolated or a bit marginalised. In a consumer world where you are trying to do things a bit differently, people can feel threatened by what you do - you are considered an extremist…I felt strongly that the Harvest Festival shares my values - so it made me feel more mainstream! The celebration of simple things. Rituals like the corn dolly draw people in to focus on the meaning - brings people together for a time to focus on the value of us all coming*

together to celebrate, as well as the things we are celebrating – harvest and the change of seasons.

For Hallowell, "ritual must be a space where something deep in the self is free to be expressed - a space free of judgement and coercion - allowing individual uniqueness, while affirming community" (1995, p. 42).

Diana Christian writes,

> A ritual connects you at deeper levels. When you make sounds together, do movements together, do some kind of creative experience together, you engage more of the whole person. Emotional energy is being worked with. Physical energy is worked with. Mental and spiritual energy are being worked with. In the best ritual, the group is functioning together at a deep soul/spiritual level. The energy this generates, which we each contribute to or draw to us, can be felt. It can feel pleasant; it often feels wonderful. It can be healing, calming, uplifting…You can experience greater intuition, more ready access to creativity. You come away with a more complete sense of yourself as an individual who is part of the group, as well as part of the larger circle of life. Your group's own identity an internal process is enhanced, so that solving problems becomes easier; there's more harmony. And it deepens the relationship and creates greater harmony between the people involved, and between them and other facets of nature (2000, page not listed).

13.7 Music, dance and feasting

> Art and music can help us connect again. It's a dialogue of the soul (Savall, 2006).

> Mesmerised, reeling in a trance, dancing wildly to the deafening drums, bells, cymbals and flutes, our spirits soar. Briefly abandoning oneself to the irresistible call we surface spontaneously liberated, like millions of possessed souls we burst into the blinding brilliance of ecstasy, joy, floating on the intoxicating effervescence of free form madness (Orloff 1981, p. 15).

Food, music and dance are traditional elements of celebrations. They are often the first things we plan when we put together a celebration. They can be processes which foster social interaction, creative expression and even in some cases facilitate journeying to deeper depths.

The health benefits of listening and playing music is acknowledged within the Western health system with the employment of music therapists within hospital settings (see www.austmta.org.au). There is increasing interest in music as a healing modality with research examining the benefits of listening (Menon and Levitin, 2005) and playing music. For example in relation to drumming, Barry Bittman and his colleagues found

> [The] drumming beat can change brain waves, producing an altered state of consciousness similar to that experienced in yoga and meditation. The psychological experience is one of visual imagery, loss of time, a sense of moving, sudden changes in temperature, feeling energies, relaxed and clear (Bittman, Bruhn, Stevens, Westengard and Ubach 2003, p. 166-7).

Hand drumming has also been used to create community (Stone, 2005). In my experience group drumming harnesses a range of wellness elements such as physical exercise, social interaction, intellectual stimulation, creative expression and learning to co-create with a group. Physicists discuss how atoms enclosed in a container at first appear to interact at random but over time are seen to be interacting in relationship. This certainly was my experience at *Firedance*. The all night drumming while a little unstructured at first found rhythms which united the group.

In traditional communities song was one of the most important vehicles of communication. The value of coming together to sing as a health activity is recognised by VicHealth who supports a Singing Across Victoria project as part of is Arts Participation Scheme (2004). This project brings together people, regardless of their vocal abilities, age, background or gender and singing.

Like music therapy, dance therapy is now a recognised health modality within mainstream health systems (see www.dtaa.org). Much has been written about the mental and physical benefits of physical activity including dance and movement (see VicHealth, 2006b and National Heart Foundation, 2001 for research summaries on the benefit of physical activities). There are of course different styles of dancing. Some

styles are quite fixed and defined while others are more organic. For dance therapists and urban shamans such as Gabrielle Roth (1998) dancing, is a personally created and styled physical movement that expresses a person's inner being. Like music a deep sense of engagement can be experienced where one loses all sense of time and place, or what Csikszentmihalyi terms a 'flow' experience (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). "In the state of rapture the dancing, the dancer and the dance become the one thing" (Houston in Maher and Ma 2003, p. 23).

Music and dance too foster deeper levels of connection. We see this most simply with partners and groups dancing together. However many cultures use music, dance, song and chants to induce trance and altered states. Psychologist, Cynthia Hickman, discusses when we are in an ecstatic state, "we dis-identify with the objects of consciousness so we can only perceive ourselves as a process" (1996, p. 120). That is in these altered states we can access different forms of knowledge and knowing not available in more physical concrete dimensions. Anthropologist Angeles Arrien (1993) refers to dancing as the warrior's way of retrieving those parts of the self that are lost or unremembered. As Mathew Fox states:

> Dance requires breath. In several African languages the word for dance and the word for breath is the same. And it is also the word for spirit. Dance is communal. Dance can be a true letting go and emptying experience. Dance connects us to all beings, for all atoms are dancing (2000, p, 185).

The following interviews from dancers talking on the video *Dances of Ecstasy* (Mahrer and Ma, 2003) illustrates this.

> And once you start dancing for a while they go right through your whole cellular structure so that your whole body starts to vibrate. And when you're all dancing en masse with a number of other people, you all start to vibrate within that frequency. Then the whole dance floor becomes a single organism.
>
> Being on the dance floor you can feel how we're all connected to each other by these fine invisible strands. We are all part of the same web.
>
> Movement reaches our deepest nature and dance creatively expresses it. When we dance we are the mystery and the creative principle… Our body is our instrument. It is immediate

> and accessible, holding our wisdom and truth. We use all of our senses when we dance…art and ritual are the voices of the spirit.

One needs to look no further than the plethora of magazines devoting articles and columns on preparing special birthday, Christmas, Easter, and Anniversary dinners to illustrate what a central role food and feasting can play in celebrations. In considering the social, cultural, economic, psychological and even political dimensions of food Ron Iphofen argues it is useful to understand how people use food to communicate (p. 2003, 28). For example, people make a statement about themselves as hosts through what food is provided and how it is presented while others take on the role of guests and through eating food demonstrate the trust they have for their hosts. It can be a very emotive experience. One that draws on previous, and creates future memories.

In a conference keynote address on food, health and the environment, Professor Fran Baum (1999) discussed the role of food as a 'social lubricant'. Graham Meltzer (2005) in his research on co-housing communities suggests that the act of eating together plays a central role in fostering social cohesion within intentional communities.

I have already alluded to how the food of migrants has played a key role in continually re-defining Australian culture. Food has been an important access point in learning about the many cultural practices and beliefs that exist. This is acknowledged with the *CERES Autumn Harvest Festival*.

> *This is great because it teaches young people about culture and food without them having to rely on books but through real life experiences* (volunteer, CERES Autumn Harvest Festival).

Food is also a very concrete reminder of our connection with the earth and how energy is continually transformed and recycled.

The artistic and creative processes outlined in this chapter can foster superficial or deep celebration experiences. The following chapter builds on the discussion of celebration practice commenced here in this chapter.

Chapter 14: Celebration Practice

> Indians talk about the Bhava and Rasa being at the very core of making a good celebration. Brava is the intention while Rasa is the essence, the juice, received (Steward and Kent, 1992).

It is all too easy to create an activity and give it the label of celebration. If done without careful consideration of the process it is seen as artificial, meaningless, manipulative, tokenistic or frivolous. This chapter explores the practices associated with celebration practices.

14.1 Communities of practice

I am interested in the close detail of celebration practice. Yet, within related academic research and literature little attention is paid to it. There are a small number of professional practice guidelines written by government or professional organisations in the field of arts management, event management, community development and health promotion generally in the form of best practice guidelines. For example, see www.festnet.com.au for articles relating to festivals and the arts and The Centre for Event Management, UTS (www.acem.uts.edu.au) has an events starter guide and handbook. Those focusing on celebrations and festivals focus on evaluation (for example see Evaluating Community Arts and Community Wellbeing by Keating, 2002). In this chapter I describe and discuss perspectives and reflections of people who organise and participate in celebrations. Following Joy Higgs and Angie Tichen (2001), who have written about this in health professions, I call this practice knowledge. They suggest that knowledge is generated in social contexts, informed by subjectivity and lived experiences. They claim that practice knowledge embraces propositional (technical), craft (professional experience) and personal knowledge (personal experience). They argue for practice that is people-centred, context-relevant, authentic (credibility and ethicality), and wise. Such an approach involves moving beyond technical knowledge to incorporate lived experiences.

Practice knowledge for celebrations can be extended by encouraging practitioners to develop communities of practice and engage in reflective learning on each of these dimensions. At a group level, celebration practitioners I spoke with engaged in reflection generally via post-event meetings where participant and professional feedback was discussed. This was often in the form of comments people made, participant surveys and discussion with colleagues. The *Woodford Folk Festival* included a public forum where the director presented his report and time was provided for participants to ask him questions. Other reflection occurred as part of preparing reports for funding agencies. As already mentioned professional forums such as conferences provided opportunities for critical reflection within the field.

While many community celebrations are repeated on a regular basis, not all practitioners exhibited a commitment to ongoing learning. Those that did mentioned how they reflected on such things as their skills, style, challenges and values in order to develop their professional artistry. Several of the experienced practitioners I spoke with exhibited deep and active reflexive practices around intention, form and content of community celebrations. They illustrated how this enabled them to change approaches in response to community changes, current tensions and capacity. Those participating in active mentoring, coaching or informal learning exchanges with experienced practitioners were also supported to engage in deeper reflexive processes. However, many practitioners stated they felt professionally isolated and opportunities to reflect on their work and to learn from their peers were appreciated.

14.2 The celebration context

> We appear to be participants in life events that are not stable, but are multidimensional, interconnected and chaotically complex (Woog 1998, p. 14).

Each celebration and each aspect within a celebration can be examined as a microcosm of a much larger process or system. Celebration 'systems' include the particular celebration itself, the ongoing celebration cycle, and the broader community celebration context which includes the history, physical surroundings, cultural frameworks, demographic make-up, social and economic conditions. And as Wilber

points out beyond families, cultures, societies, nations to ultimately the earth and the entire universe (2005). The dynamic nature of celebration contexts also needs to be acknowledged.

There are three main stages in the celebration cycle. I draw these from my observations of celebrations.

- ***Pre-celebration***

The conceptualisation phase was a period where dreams and expectations would often flourish. This was often subsequently tempered with the organisational practicalities associated with planned dreams. For some, it was a time of hope and anticipation, for others it is a time of trepidation. One could study who had power in the pre-event phase by identifying who was included and excluded and on what basis, who made decisions and the values that influenced the celebration format. This necessarily meant studying the relationships that existed within the community and how celebration practices influenced either positive social interaction or conflict. It was a time of organising and preparing the space and the people.

- ***The celebration itself***

This was the focal space where people communed and celebrated together. It was a time when attention of the past, present and future merge. For some, they are busy doing while others are busy enjoying. Having a clear beginning and end was viewed as important by several organisers. For organisers it is also a time of flexibility and innovation under pressure. It too was a time when expectations met reality. For some it was a meaningful experience, for others it was simply fun. While for others again it was a time of loneliness. Alternatively, it could be all of these.

- ***Post-celebration***

For organisers the period after the celebration clean up was often dedicated to reflection and administrative tasks. Ideally it is accessed as a positive rather than negative emotional memory.

I found it useful to review celebrations across each of these stages and where they are repeated, over several cycles as it provided greater insight into the rhythms of the celebrations and the communities in which they were located.

Each community created celebrations specific to their context. And as the community changed, so too, did the ways they celebrated. There was no one uniform experience, each community celebration could be viewed as a unique expression of the community, and in particular the organisers, and as such, had 'its own personality'. Specific contextual factors that shaped a community celebration included:

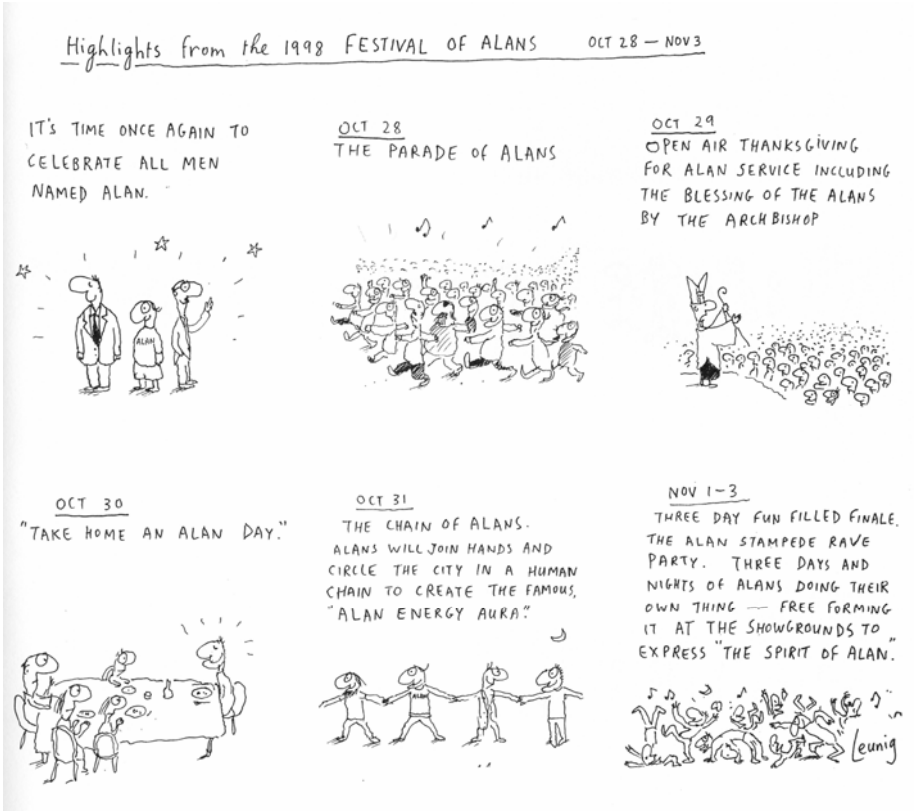
- the **place** and its social and economic history as well as the physical environment.
- the **purpose** of the community celebration.
- the **people** involved. In particular, the drivers of a particular celebration and what skill sets they had. On a more general level, factors included the demographic mix of cultural backgrounds, ages, experiences, length of time living in the community and current community tensions.
- the **model(s) of practice** that was adopted to create the community celebration and foster engagement. By a model of practice I mean whether the celebration drew on traditions of event management, or community cultural development, shamanistic practices or other.
- **community participation or representation.** Most towns and shires in Australia produce an event calendar which enables one to gauge which groups in particular regions participate or are represented in celebrations. Some groups were regularly represented, others not at all.
- **Social and economic trends.** Many places were grappling with change, for example, the loss of traditional employment, new community groups moving into the area, or decreasing water availability.

14.3 Practitioner insights and wisdoms

> If you show people you don't care, they'll return the favour. Show them you care about them, they'll reciprocate (Bolman and Deal in Deal and Key 1998, p. 58).

The following draws on the professional and personal knowledge shared during the interviews and workshops conducted with practitioners, particularly those interested in the health and wellbeing of communities.

14.3.1 Deciding on what type of community celebration



(Leunig 1999, no page number listed)

A requirement of celebration practice is to be clear about purpose or intention. For Cameron the aim should be for events to lead to "coherence, deep effects for each participant and a sense of shared experience" (2004, p. 2). Identifying the core principles and values that would guide the community celebration helped to provide a guiding framework for decision making when a range of agendas came into play. Practitioners who had health and wellbeing as a primary focus were particularly

concerned about "*What is RIGHT"* for a particular person or community. Many of the organisers of the community celebrations in Victoria started by asking, "*What will bring together THIS community at this point in TIME*?" This was not always the agenda for others such as event managers. At a workshop for celebration organisers I ran, it was questioned whether the *Loddon Celebration of Health and Wellbeing* which had a strong focus on sporting competitions was a celebration. The main activity was a football match for prisoners. Possibly not, but it was a common and 'safe' activity that could foster engagement between prisoners and provide a positive experience when they played together. It was the first time there was an activity for all prisoners since the prison had opened thirteen years earlier. This was viewed by the organiser as an important starting point that would enable future gatherings. A bush dance didn't attract people in Horsham but it did in Carisbrook[27]. What brought a group of homeless people together in Melbourne was different from a drought-affected community in rural Victoria or newly arrived refugees and families living on welfare. Being sensitive to the tensions and community dynamics was an important issue for community celebrations organisers. One of the aims of the *Snowy Errinundra Bike Ride* was relationship building. As the director of Community Health in Orbost pointed out, this required *"a lot of careful planning… This probably couldn't have happened five years ago,"* recognising that the conflict between the various resident groups would have been *"…too raw"*. Several towns which had been experiencing economic hardship through drought and other natural disasters wanted their event to be free. They did not want to draw on the resources of local businesses who were also struggling. One of the organisers of the *Mallacoota Festival* said

> *Over the past nine months our committee has been actively engaged in fundraising and debt recovery. This coupled, with the threat of bushfires stretched our human resources and it has been decided rather than have a festival with all the attendant expectations, it would be better to focus on a few events that will be achievable within our capacity.*

Working where the community 'was at' was often appreciated by residents. For example, one Natimuk resident stated

[27] See pARTy in the Parks in appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

I wanted to take a gradual approach and slowly build. I was worried it would get to big too quick and spoil … Gradually …it is drawing the whole community together too.

As already mentioned, there is a fine balance in retaining elements that are faithful to community traditions and being responsive to changing times. It would appear beneficial to have a focus on the past and the new if a unified rather than disparate energy was desired. The organisers of *Art Is…* responded to change by adopting a different theme each year and having an open format. They commented

The theme worked, we can bend and twist a theme as much as we want. But there's a basic format that we try not to change in that there will always be a school workshop programme and there will be always be community workshops, exhibitions, films, you know, performances and so on. But I find it quite interesting coming in with different ideas. And, you know, people respond to change.

New people coming in for art directorship and on the committee brings in new and different ideas each year. It is not about topping the year before. Different ideas, stimulate different participation in committee and gradually draws in new groups.

We can't keep doing same thing over and over. It'll get boring. The diversity and new ideas challenges us all the time.

One Aboriginal elder explained to me, certain gatherings and ceremonies occurred when the community needed it or in response to the rhythms of the land.

As already discussed there was often pressure on organisers to repeat events and make them 'bigger and better' the following year. A more responsive approach would respond to the needs of the community. This is what occurred in Ouyen where the *Ouyen Rain-dance* was not repeated.

> *This celebration arose from a current need and was tailored to the needs of the community. It has been left as a unique one off event rather than try and replicate the same format each year.*

Several celebration organisers began with a visioning or dreaming process, one that engaged people's imagination. They then ran with it and built on it with opportunities that subsequently arose. Useful questions that were used to explore this included, *"What is the history/heritage of this individual/community? What are their strengths and assets? What has been the journey so far? What are people grateful for?"* Often successful activities were built on simple ideas and themes. Practitioners recognised that a single purpose such as community building was easier than multiple agendas such as community building, fundraising and tourism.

> *Keep it simple, stupid…It works well. Trust people to do what they are good at…And to give them permission to do it and let them do it…* (festival organiser, Dunnolly).

> *Need to focus on something small and do it really well rather than spread too wide. Not over tax themselves* (community development officer, Bealiba).

> *I feel that a smaller and more intimate festival led people to feel included, people coming to all the events because there were not too many* (organiser, Mallacoota).

The nature of the small-scale community celebrations that drew on local assets adopted by *pARTy in the Parks*[28] recognised that small towns were well placed to develop their own community orientated festivals with little financial support.

[28] See appendix one for a brief description of this celebration.

14.3.2 Getting people involved

> Many arts festivals can and do exclude or include on the basis of ethnicity or class, and perhaps gender or race, in ways that range from the sophisticated to the crude, the transparent to the tacit (Waterman 1998, p. 67).

Each community celebration examined was often driven by a core group of interested and often passionate people. Who this group was, their skills and experiences influenced the dominant purpose, the practices undertaken and hence the style of the celebration. For example, there were tendencies for:

- *artists* to focus on the celebration as a vehicle for the arts and for showcasing local artists and producing high quality art products;
- professional *community workers* to use these as informal learning opportunities or at least opportunities to provide people with information; to identify or support local leaders, community bonding and building, youth work and reconciliation activities;
- *communities of interest* such as placed based, community groups, ethnic and interest groups to showcase themselves;
- *event managers* wanting it to run smoothly and safely;
- *priests* to be concerned with religious traditions;
- *celebrants* to take the lead on personalised civic ceremonies; and
- *shamans* to focus on community healing and growth.

Having said this I acknowledge that these were trends only and did not always apply to the individual practitioner.

Among the community celebrations examined in my research there was variation in the degree to which each community drew on local resources to create, organise and deliver community celebrations. Smaller festivals generally were planned and managed largely by local volunteers. Sometimes this was done with the help of a community worker. Some were able to pay for expenses and perhaps some artistic input. As they grew in size there was often a need to draw on people with professional skills either in a paid or voluntary capacity. A representational decision-

making model usually involving a committee or organising group on behalf of a broader community was adopted by most of the community celebrations to manage the planning, implementation and evaluation. The committee (or organising group) was either drawn from

- community organisations such as community health, neighbourhood houses, arts organisations and/or;
- community volunteers; and/or
- paid workers including festival directors.

Larger festivals were generally managed by professionals brought in from outside the community who would co-opt the support of local volunteers.

Most of the community celebrations examined in Victoria sort to draw on local assets. While some people believed bringing resources such as artists from outside the community stifled or devalued local input, others such as *Art Is…* did so when local people were not available. However, an important part of the process was to partner 'outside' artists with local people interested in developing skills. It was identified as important that where 'outsiders' were brought in these practitioners needed to have the appropriate skills in working with communities. Several festivals gave examples of where they had poor experiences with visiting professionals who were unable to work 'with' communities. As mentioned by the festival director of *Art Is…*

> *I wanted to make sure that the people we had coming in to perform or to run workshops would be really good at working with a rural community and working with kids and adults and people who have never probably even seen anything of their culture before. And be really patient with that…*

She went on to explain that the use of *"outsiders was positive"* as long as it was controlled by locals. She felt it *"important if we want to expand people's consciousness to challenge homogeneity"*. These co-operative and collaborative approaches enabled local capacity to be built. Skill sharing meant that as people left a community others were able to take their place.

Expectations of community celebrations were influenced by cultural frameworks and prior experiences. Negative prior experiences with celebrations, organisations or individuals involved in the organising groups sometimes led to difficulties in fostering (re)engagement. Celebration organisers needed positive relationships to exist and for people to trust them. Some community cultural development workers and people in small communities would get buy-in quickly and easily as they drew on preexisting relationships. 'Outside' professionals would also draw on the relationships local artists and workers had. Because of this however, several mentioned they were conscious about adopting processes that were respectful of these relationships. This involved being mindful of, and responding to local norms.

Among celebration organisers there were various understandings of what it is to work 'with' people and what is meaningful engagement. Subsequently the degree to which opportunities were created for people to be involved in their own terms varied. For some, conceptual input or contribution to an artistic product conceived by an artist for community members was identified as meaningful engagement. Others with skills and experience in community development were more inclined to adopt ways of working that enabled the communities to conceive and, implement the entire celebration themselves. In terms of who controls the decision making and allowing input, the community celebrations I examined could be grouped under the following categories:

1. *Closed model* where people were invited to be involved in a format decided upon by the committee or organising group

2. *Open model*. This provided permission for any individual or organisation who wanted to contribute and this contribution was accepted and not judged (as long as it was consistent with the core festival values). This adopted more collaborative or co-created approaches.

3. *Mixed model*. This involved both structured elements predetermined by an organising group and open elements where anyone could contribute what they wished.

The closed, prescriptive model adopted a more exclusive approach where input into the celebration format and content was controlled by a select core group. More open celebrations worked towards collaborative approaches that allowed for a broader range of people to express themselves.

The differing frameworks guiding each professional group influenced how community was viewed. Is the community an asset or even a liability to be managed? Those most likely to engage in discourse about power were the community cultural development workers and health workers. There were those who viewed themselves as a technical expert and external advisor rather than a collaborative partner. For example, Reid and Arcodia (2002) identified that engaging stakeholders was useful in gaining community support. Rob Harris (2005), the director of the Centre for Event Management at the University of Technology, Sydney suggests that benefits of community engagement from an event management perspectives are in overcoming resistance or opposition and in generating a pool of volunteers.

Alternatively, community development takes a more people-centred approach. According to the World Health Organisation community development

> aims to develop social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities with a particular focus on marginalised members. It has a participatory emphasis on identifying solutions to community problems based on local knowledge and priorities (World Health Organisation, VicHealth and the University of Melbourne 2004, p. 52).

For my thesis I have studied celebrations that have largely been guided by a community development ethos. But I would suggest that, in the larger scheme of things, few celebrations succeed in implementing community development approaches.

Responding to local needs and interests was recognised by the co-ordinator of Connecting Confident Communities:

> *We have learnt to value a diversity of models… for communities to design celebrations for themselves…by us, for us, with us…to express the uniqueness and character of each town rather than adopt the Maryborough model.*

As highlighted previously there is a web of power within each community. Experienced celebration organisers would identify who has it, and who does not, and where it is contested and negotiated. They would ask questions such as *"Who are the most marginalised within the community? Are they represented by other public activities that occur within the community? How can their voices be heard and included? What assets do they bring that could be celebrated? How can organisers ensure their contribution be valued and respected?"*

In my experience supporting genuine engagement was particularly challenging for many celebration organisers. Inexperienced practitioners, whether paid or volunteer, believed they were being inclusive by putting an advertisement in the newspaper inviting people to participate. Other celebration organisers I interviewed found that planning celebrations that promote wellbeing is more complex than simply inviting input. For individuals or community groups who may experience internalised forms of oppression, they may not recognise they have a right to be involved, feel culturally safe to express themselves, or they may simply not have the support or resources to do so. In these instances it takes experienced and skilled organisers to work closely with these individuals, groups and communities to enable a safe context for people to control the form and context of their expression and enabling people to seek personal and collective power.

This was most evident in the *VicHealth* funded festivals which sought to provide safe contexts for diverse groups of people to contribute to the festival program and format. In contrast, on the other end of the continuum were festivals such as the *Chilli Festival,* a commercial venture that did not provide any participatory opportunities at all except for food tasting.

The community celebrations I studied in Victoria were often led by a particular group such as the local theatre group or a health service committee who would seek to

engage individuals, local community groups and other agencies in the planning and management of the community celebration. For smaller volunteer-run community celebrations this may have simply involved people meeting and coming up with ideas and if someone wanted to run with something they could *"if it is your idea you are responsible for making it happen"*. A similar model of permission giving for people to contribute what ever they wanted and having it promoted under an overriding festival theme was adopted by larger and professional community festivals. Some such as *Art Is…* would provide support to people who lacked experience by partnering with people who had more extensive experience. Others commissioned artists to actively engage with particular parts of the community in creating a cultural product such as a performance. This generated a diversity of cultural products, be they non professional, semi-professional and/or professional.

Other gatherings were based on informal networks around common interests and provided spaces where the format emerged out of the contributions people made at the time. This organic approach tended to develop its own energy and rhythm. The encouragement and respect for people's contribution enabled people to come from a space of gratitude for the celebration that ensued. An example of this approach is *Confest*. As Graeme St John describes

> This inclusive ethic of selfless service, co-operation and tolerance distinguishes Confest from most other festivals I've been to. The experience relies upon the input of very participant, upon people taking responsibility together. All are encouraged to contribute their skills, labour and art to the unfolding and upkeep of the community. As a result, each event explodes spontaneously into shapes and patterns unforeseen, a spontaneity making Confest an extraordinarily unpredictable counterscape, and inimitable temporary autonomous zone. Though Confest possesses familiar landmarks and conventional features, every event is characterised by a fresh arrangement of the familiar, a touch of chaos, a kind of magic (2000, p. 84).

Some organisers who were intent on the celebration engaging with a variety of groups, simply tried to anticipate what each group wanted. Wearing the hat of each of the different sub-communities, and how they would perceive the different ideas generated, was used by one practitioner to gauge potential receptivity. Several of the more experienced practitioners sought representation from various community groups to ensure access and acceptability. However, the adoption of a representational

decision-making model led to gate-keeping in some instances. For example, other community members did not agree with how 'their' cultural community was being represented by the committee representative. Generally there was less involvement by people who were most marginalised within broad community-based celebrations. Several organisers over time actively built relationships with sections of the community least likely to self nominate to be involved. And did so in a way that was respectful and did not leave a community feeling, as one interviewee put it, '*used and deflated*'.

In *Art Is…* the director displayed skill in developing a personal relationship with the local Aboriginal community who had been physically driven out of the region and now numbered only a few families. The festival director said, "*initially the community was shy*". Members of the Aboriginal community told me that through their involvement in *Art Is…* performances, individuals developed trust in engaging with others. They found gaining artistic skills provided them with a vehicle to express their grief and loss with past events. This was initially achieved through partnering the Koori community with Maori artists from Melbourne. The resulting performances educated their own community as well as the broader one about Aboriginal cultural practices and beliefs. Those individuals I spoke to expressed how subsequently there has been a lot more respect and tolerance from others within the general community. Others mentioned how it increased their confidence and they now used the skills they gained in other ways within the community.

> *This is the first time we have a local indigenous boys dance group… to see little boys do indigenous dance… to see their development over time… they are well accepted now by the community* (performer, Art Is…).

The organisers of the *Fringe Feast* adopted by the Melbourne Fringe who did not have a prior relationship with the residents of the housing estate involved also spent a great deal of time developing a positive trusting relationship.

> *The initial response of the Neighbourhood Advisory Board was a little suspicious of the intentions of the Fringe, and they shared fears of the*

> *Fringe reputation for radical behaviour spreading onto the estate* (director, Melbourne Fringe).

The practitioners involved in this project soon recognised the need to modify what could be achieved and how people could be engaged in the short term and the need to develop relationships for the longer term. *"Now we are well placed to do something in the next couple of years"* (director, Melbourne Fringe).

Several celebration organisers were particularly conscious of the need for the celebration space to be perceived as 'safe' to participate in. For example, the organisers of *Where the Heart Is* held the festival on a Friday so to reduce the likelihood of large numbers of the general public coming along. As one of the organisers explained:

> *The client group often don't do things because they feel excluded. The cost is, when they do go out and they get stared at. It is good they can come to something like this and enjoy it.*

It enabled homeless people to be the centre of attention. And by having it on a Friday all the workers could be there. Furthermore, promotion in the media was conducted after rather than before the festival *"which would help ensure a respectful space was maintained. This worked well"* (organiser, Where the Heart Is). They also provided a diversity of activities that enabled people to participate on their own terms and comfort levels.

> *By the end of the day the people who are the least able are the ones who can, at least, come and have their hair cut, photo taken and listen to the music* (organiser, Where the Heart Is).

The importance of respecting relationships was noted,

> *…my work's very much about continuity and skilling people up…You just can't blow in, you know, give everybody a fabulous time - or a rotten time, as the case sometimes it is, cause people to fight when a bit of money comes*

into communities - and then blow out again without leaving something behind (community cultural development worker)

Trust was also an important aspect that influenced what happened and how. The *Snowy Errinundra Bike Ride* was located in Orbost where there had been traditional hostilities between the pro-logging sections of the community and the environmentalists. This event sought to build relationships between these two groups through holding a bike ride in the region. This required members of these two groups to work together to play hosts to tourists who would be riding through and attending nightly festivities in the towns in the area. It was in part due to the relationship that Community Health Services in Orbost had with these groups that they were best placed to provide leadership for the Snowy Errinundra bike ride.

The centre has strong and neutral connection to all the sub communities (ie greenies, timber workers, business people). We interact with everyone…and have their trust. They knew we should act in the best interests of the community (director, Community Health, Orbost).

Many practitioners sought to involve the whole person, inspire people, enable people to create something they related to, something that touched their emotions. Subsequently, they provided opportunities for people to be creative and learn new skills in relation to story telling, singing and the visual arts. As was discussed in greater depth in chapter thirteen, story, music, food and feasting are all accessible art forms while the use of story-making and rituals used by some helped to foster deeper levels of meaning. Creating a diverse range of activities that required either passive or active participation enabled people to engage at a level they were comfortable with. And it was apparent that informal, and not just formal, spaces at celebrations were important for people to come together. For example chai tents and kitchens were popular places for people to hang out.

Celebrations emphasise the 'special'. "We change the atmosphere: the lighting, the sounds, the adornments - to create 'a space apart'" (Oldfield 1996, p. 164). Celebrations were often a time of permission giving, for people to do something special even if it was simply wearing special clothes. For some, it is the element of

the unexpected that they enjoyed. The director of *Woodford Folk Festival* stated it is this *"sense of surprise, fifth gear"* that he strives for.

Dorothy McRae-McMahon (2005a) discussed the concept of ritual acting as a container and the role of celebration practitioners being to create expectations about the kind of behaviour or conduct that should fill the encased space and time. Different types of frames also involve different emotional moods or atmospheres. Experienced practitioners were often mindful of how the space created provides permission or otherwise for certain behaviours.

In the celebrations I examined, there was often consciousness about dealing with the physical and sometimes the social and even learning dimensions of celebrations but there was often a lack of clear intention and support structures to deal with the emotional and potential spiritual dimensions. This is an area where shamanic and religious celebration, ceremony and ritual excels.

14.3.3 What makes a celebration authentic?

Bolman and Deal point out, "when ritual and ceremony are authentic and attuned, they fire the imagination, evoke insight, and touch the heart" (1995, p. 111). While Cheryl Walter notes, "community is created or built, or not, with each of our actions; with our consciousness concerning ourselves, others, and the issues; and with our relationships, whatever the task" (1997, p. 74). She goes on to argue process and content are inseparable and that there needs to be

> congruence between what we do and how we do it, a joining of ends and means, is essential if we aim to foster communication, participation, diversity, identity, a shared vision, and the other elements and ingredients of community (1997, p. 74).

'Top down' approaches tended to alienate people and did not have an authentic feel to them. Authenticity in this context refers to having meaning. There was a clear divide between those who were observing or participating, and those who were organising, performing, selling, cooking or some other active role. Collaborative decision making

enabled people to negotiate their roles and contributions, and so their 'participation' became an active and authentic experience. However, experiences were moderated by their skills and knowledge, the time they could devote and available resources.

A recurring theme was that often people transferred the 'bells and whistles' including symbols and products but not the celebration process across contexts. Cameron states that the

> …tendency is clearly to ask few questions about the inner meaning, the form, the history and the raison d'être. The subject matter is often treated superficially and leans towards consumption and passive absorption rather than participation (2004, p. 133).

This has been my experience for the majority of celebrations that I have witnessed over the course of my life. For example, during this research I attended several local street festivals held by local government authorities. Most often these would be a collection of commercial stalls with a jumping castle and a few wandering circus clowns thrown in. They were non-stimulating passive activities that did not engender any feelings of 'community' or celebration. They reminded me of stocking fillers - simply taking up space. My experience with *Gather the Women*, a spiritual gathering for International Women's Day, was another celebration that did not resonate with me. This is an extract that I wrote from an email at the time (March, 2003) in response to others who were also disappointed with the process adopted.

> *I too was very disturbed by the lack of acknowledgement of what women have been doing forever - this may have been new to the organisers but women have been gathering for millennia. It is important to acknowledge the journey and the context. There were very loose practices re casting the circle and linking of activities. While it was well intentioned I found much of it paternalistic, 'power to the women', based on concepts of charity/philanthropy, tolerance but not understanding and acceptance. My small group did not follow good group principles. For example, the facilitator reinterpreted what people said rather than writing what they did say, or not writing it at all. Many of the comments were based on business and life coaching concepts. I am so over visioning using questions and*

> *butchers paper. I didn't like the questions. It just wasn't what I would have hoped for.*

Another participant wrote at the time,

> *spiritual practice is NOT entertainment. It can be lots of fun, pleasurable, deeply enjoyable, but not entertainment or a distraction.*

I had a similar experience with a local *Firedance*. While the Australian version had many of the visual elements of the USA version, this gathering did not take on many of the process elements. The one I attended was a poor copy and did not appear to have any central values driving it. The space was not kept sacred in any way, people came in and out of the circle, took photos and video of participants without seeking consent. There was no acknowledgement of intent, the traditional owners of the land or cleansing the site or people. There was no opening ceremony. Alcohol and hash were used to hold the drumming throughout the night. This group did not appear to understand the deep personal transformational experiences that can occur within this context and did not provide a supportive context for this. Despite this, and because the involvement of others who chose to attend who had previous *Firedance* experiences, over the course of a weekend the community learnt to create and share in a more healing and learning experience. Learning occurred through informal modeling. By watching and observing others people learnt how they could contribute. While the focus remained on the drummers, spaces were eventually provided for voice work. Suggestions were increasingly heard and taken up, such as a closing circle where people were able to share what they wished. This allowed people to give thanks and acknowledge the Aboriginal heritage of the land. A report was posted on the internet by the main organiser who recognised how his experience had been enriched by the differing contributions.

The *Gather the Women* and *Firedance* experiences lacked authenticity for me and I put this down to the inexperience of the organisers with facilitating ritual. Dorothy Macrae-McMahon who has conducted hundreds of ceremonies and rituals asserts many people are now uncomfortable and self conscious about ritual. She suggests that where there is no clear process in ritual, the degree of engagement will be limited.

For her seasonally based rituals, Glenys Livingstone used a fixed structure within a specially created space:

- warming the energy;
- gathering the people;
- centering by using a breathing meditation;
- statement of purpose;
- creating sacred space;
- invocation;
- seasonal rite or body of the ritual;
- sharing of food or communion;
- storytelling; and
- opening the circle (2002, p. 136).

Her facilitation and clear structure demanded the participants' full attentiveness. Skills and processes such as these lead to the possibility of a deeper and more authentic experience for participants.

However, some people can find ritual stifling (Pett, Lang and Gander 1992, p. 548). This was evident with the Ecoliving celebrations. People were uncomfortable with engaging with the arts and expressed even greater discomfort with ritual. Many perceived of themselves as 'scientists' and were sensitive about inviting criticism from their colleagues about such activities. There was greater degree of comfort with restricting 'celebrations' to education activities at festivals and expos.

14.3.4 Dealing with the challenges of creating and managing celebrations

In almost any celebration there are different views about the format, structure and who should be involved. For example, think of the tensions between family members over how a wedding should be planned, or between community groups about what activities the local festival should include. In some cases these differences lead to conflicts and family gatherings and festivals being cancelled. But

in some cases, these differences lead to robust but productive discussion about changes, and ideas to share values, stories, hopes and dreams. Practitioners often mentioned how they reflected on what went wrong and what they learnt from this.

Many celebration practitioners also mentioned how getting the basic logistical aspects right was essential in reducing frustration. Common barriers to participation mentioned by organisers included inadvertently scheduling events in conflict with other major events - for example, organising a festival on a Sunday, a popular sporting day in the country which also happened to fall on Mothers Day, or not catering for poor weather.

> *The nature of people's lives mean that people have limited time and there are many other competing activities* (volunteer organiser).

Financial costs often restricted access to celebrations, as did site limitations and transport options. This is where government sponsored public celebrations play such an important role. It is a legislative requirement that access and equity be considered.

Organising a festival can take a lot of collective effort. Some first-time organisers underestimated the time and commitment required to get these things up and happening.

> *I've never been that tired in my life* (manager, health service).

> *It took a lot of energy to get it up and running. I'd never done it before. I was shocked* (health worker, Where the Heart Is).

> *It was very hard work…required a lot of careful planning...a lot of hours.* (organiser, Snowy Errinundra Festival).

> *I'm a bit worn out. It was so much effort, so many things to do* (celebration organiser, Bealiba).

All celebration organisers could clarify what they would not do again. Several openly discussed how they were not able to engage particular groups they wanted to. There were many examples provided of logistical problems that were encountered overall and particular activities that would need to be addressed in future activities.

Many plans that organisers had were often bigger than what could be executed so many initiatives were subsequently modified.

> *We only did a quarter of what was planned…What we really learnt is that we need more dedicated time to make it happen* (organiser, Where the Heart Is).

Clarifying people's roles, including those of volunteers, was seen to be important as was providing support structures for them. Transparency about who gets paid, benefits and entitlements, opportunities for ongoing involvement helps to reduce misunderstandings.

> *The story of volunteers is at the heart of festival organising…equity between volunteer groups, clarity about benefits and expectations, provision of opportunities for ongoing involvement, flexibility and self-praise are important* (event manager, CERES).

Being flexible and the ability to respond to a changing context was essential. Neil Cameron notes in regard to the *Woodford Folk Festival*:

> The festival is not a consumer affair. It is an experience which is not there to be judged, not to be bought, but to be enjoyed through participation, by making it happen. It is a community in which anyone can be part of an audience one minute and be serving at a bar the next (1995, p. 13).

Several organisers of small town festivals learnt the value of having a central space for people to come together and how that helped energise the celebrations. They found that spreading events out across multiple sites decreases the energy and places pressure on the organisers.

Garage sales meant people stayed at home (community development officer, Bealiba).

The director of the *Woodford Folk Festival* made a point in 2005 of naming site limitations, financial problems, poor weather, problems with ticketing as just a few logistical challenges. At the opening ceremony the elder officiating sought to dispel that there were tensions between the organisers and the local Aboriginal community. He saw such challenges as learning opportunities. He also wanted others to do likewise. Part of the pledge made by participants at the opening ceremony was to forgive the organisers for things that would go wrong.

The next chapter concludes this thesis with insights and learning generated by this research.

Chapter 15: Revisiting the Celebration Spiral: Frameworks for Understanding Celebration Practice

What can we do?
We can do simple things like
…sharing meals and asking each other what was special about the day.
…taking time to participate in the arts, dance, make music and share a feast with others.
…integrating simple rituals into our celebrations.
…taking children along to community celebrations where they learn to be in community and value the diversity that exists in the world.
…listening to the rhythms of the earth, acknowledging the seasons, remembering we are connected to the past and the future.
…simply valuing the opportunity of being alive and the potential that it provides.

In this final chapter I present diagrams and tables that attempt to summarise features of celebrations that make them either superficial or engaging. These are not intended to be good practice guidelines. Instead they present a framework from which guidelines can, in future be developed.

People have always and will continue to celebrate. Contemporary celebration forms vary from the public to the private, the large scale to the intimate, from the kitsch to the deeply spiritual. Given the diversity of celebration types it is not possible to make universal statements about them as group. Even for an individual celebration, there will be those for whom it is a highly charged emotional experience where they feel alive and vital, for others it is simply light entertainment and offers some respite from life. While for others it can be a deeply meaningful and healing experience. I believe there is a need for greater consideration and consciousness about what and how we celebrate. My research has increased my awareness of the importance of creating celebrations that foster the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Unhealthy Celebrations ◄———		———► **Celebrations for Health and Wellbeing**
• Negative transformation leading to ill health (social, mental, spiritual, emotional, physical)	• Immediate gratification • Ameliorative experience (fun, joyful)	• Appropriate to context and stage of development • Liberation from oppression • Healing • Deep transformation leading to social, emotional, mental, physical and spiritual health

Table 3: Celebration and health gradient

Celebrations can be signposts or landmarks during our life. As outlined in table three above, they have the potential to be transformational - a pathway to healing and growth. During the important early childhood years they can help children experience a 'sense of belonging' and be opportunities where the people around a young person can demonstrate they are cared for and value them for who they are. Celebrations can help us to 'become' all that we are in relation to the broader communities in which we are located. As experiential activities they leave imprints on our social, emotional, mental, physical and spiritual selves. However, if not attended to with care they can be part of contributing to people's hurts and even leave negative imprints on our psyche and our beliefs about ourselves and others which subsequently influences our behaviours. During the course of this research people mentioned a range of things that made celebrations challenging or even traumatic such as the escalating hostility and negative interpersonal conflict that can occur around expectations; increased demands on their time and the general stress of organising a celebration; the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs during a celebration which lead to conflict and violence; depression at not feeling included or triggering grief.

Celebrations can also play an important role in connecting the individual not just to their own sense of self but in weaving them into the broader fabric of life - to the communities they belong to and the places where they live and work. They can be places that remind someone of where they fit within broader humanity and the earth over time.

At the collective level celebrations can strengthen communities through shaping identities, providing a sense of community and by providing opportunities for creativity. Celebrations are important learning opportunities in that they provide a way for people to become aware of 'community' and to learn to be in community, to work together. They can be an important vehicle for learning about how power is used and negotiated by communities and be opportunities to increase political and social awareness. They too bring people together to value and affirm diversity and allow groups to work through conflict and differences in search of connections and continuities. The multi-dimensional, experiential nature of celebrations would appear to provide the opportunity to move towards more transformative learning.

As discussed previously these social, emotional, political elements mentioned above have all been found to directly impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, both in the moment and over time. While this reinforces that celebrations do indeed contribute, either positively or even negatively, to the health and wellbeing of individuals and community to what degree is best understood in context.

Diagram 1: Factors impacting on the celebration experience

As diagram 1 illustrates, the celebration experience and the degree to which it enhances health is influenced by the interaction that occurs between the individual, the celebration context and the practices adopted.

For the individual each experience is unique and mediated by such things as their expectations, often based on prior experiences, as well as a willingness (or not) to engage in the celebration. That is, are they 'present' and not concerned about other things going on in their lives. If the celebration is not meaningful or mindful of the broader context of people's lives, then people will not connect with the celebration. The degree of engagement will also be influenced by their values and how these fit with the celebration and their social skills. The celebration experience traverses the period prior, during and after a celebration means that the above aspects are dynamic over the course of a celebration.

In my research I found that the celebration context often sets the tone and intentions of the celebration. The celebration process often focuses our attention, whether it be at a superficial or deep level. Are people guided to just focus on consuming products or are they supported to journey deeper to learn more about themselves and the broader context in which they live? Does it seek to move beyond cognitive and physical processes to access other sensory dimensions? Rachel Kohn from the ABC radio program *The Spirit of Things* when reviewing the life of Joseph Campbell quoted him as saying, "Our lives are much broader and deeper than you conceive it to be. You can live in terms of that depth" (Kohn, 2005). Conscious celebration practice can provide a pathway to reach these depths.

The ability to support a deeper journey is influenced by the values and intentions of the organisers and communities as well as their capacities. Do they have the processes and resources to facilitate conscious engagement? Do they listen to each other and the places where they live? Are they responsive to people's needs? Do they provide a 'safe' opportunity that is respectful and non-judgemental. Do the processes adopted liberate or oppress? Is a 'safe' environment created where people can contribute on their own terms? Or do they seek to impose models and ideas from elsewhere such as the need to sell products irrespective of local concerns? Whose

symbols are represented? Do the processes bring people together to discuss, dialogue and experience what differentiates and what unites. Does the celebration move beyond the head to explore what lies in people's hearts and provide active participatory experiences. Or do they simply offer passive commercial activities where people simply walk by each other?

In summary, this is consistent with context- and people- centred approaches. Key features of celebration practices that take such an approach are summarised in the following table.

Superficial engagement		**Deep, multidimensional engagement**
Loose activities with unclear intentions Passive activities (eg watching, buying items) Use of drugs to access altered states	A chance to participate • Games • Popular music and dancing • Feasting • Participatory art and creative activities	A safe and supportive container is provided in which the celebration occurs. The format includes welcome, setting intention, participating in creative self expression (individual and collective) through storytelling, music, dance, ritual and ceremony. Time for reflection. Closing.
Unconscious practices • Unreflective adoption of pre-packaged approach • Activities that oppress through words and actions		Wise practitioners who engage in self reflection (personal, technical, professional) and have excellent communication, organisational, creative and people skills. Conscious practices include • Positive intention • Focusing attention through conscious use of art and ritual (see diagram 2) • Listening • Awareness of power dynamics and seek to be emancipatory • Strengths based • Build individual and community capacity over time
Not meaningful • Do not identify with it (eg not personalised, no stories or symbols included)		Authentic, meaningful, relevant Responsive to particular context, time and needs. This may draw on fixed formats or more open ones drawn from the group.
Not fostering connections to local context (people, earth, spiritual)	Exclusive Bonding and no bridging capital	Value placed on connections (people, earth, spiritual) Value diversity Social capital (bridging and bonding) Unified story (what we share in common)
An organiser controls the celebration processes		People co-create and collaborate (dream, inspire and work together)

Table 4: Celebration practices

As this table suggests there is no one 'ideal' approach but the following general **set of principles** provide a guide.

A 'healthy' celebration that allows for deep, multidimensional engagement fosters a *safe environment* where people co-create the celebration and a safe and supportive container is provided in which the celebration occurs. Making the space 'special' or 'sacred' being part of this. 'Healthy' celebrations are *responsive to* the particular *context*, time and needs of the community(s) involved and seek to build individual and community capacity over time. In addition, there is *awareness about power* and how it may overtly or covertly liberate or oppress.

The celebration format allows for *conscious*, as opposed to unconscious, *participation* in a process that involves, a welcome, setting intentions, focusing attention through participation in creative self expression (individual and collective play, feasting, storytelling, music, dance, ritual and ceremony and so forth) (see diagram 2). They *seek to value diversity but to identify what unites*. This moves beyond a shallow to a deeper, intentional, more conscious and authentic celebration experience. Opportunity is also provided for people to reflect on the experience and the there is some acknowledgement that closes the celebration and provides for a *supported re-entry into everyday life*.

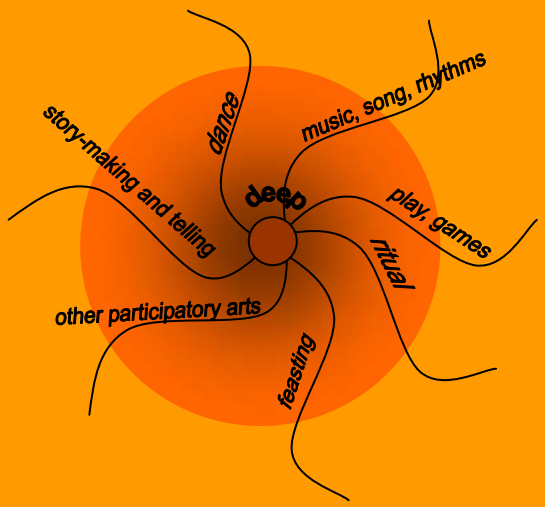


Diagram 2: Moving towards deeper engagement

My research illustrates the possibilities for health workers, community workers and modern day shamans to (re)engage with celebrations. To move beyond simply seeing them as vehicles for information provision, health checks and limiting their involvement to creating healthy environments at existing festivals. But rather recognising them as ways of responding to the uniqueness and dynamic nature of peoples' lives and enabling communities to engage in creativity, art, play and ritual in ways that enhance health and wellbeing over time. In doing so, providing communities and the people who live in them spaces and processes to be, belong and become.

> May you always live in a loving community
> Where justice matters
> Where fairness and authenticity abounds
> And where the streets are filled
> With the joys of life, of learning, and of laughing. (Rappaport and Seidman 2000, p. v)

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Appendix 1 Communities Together Community Celebrations

pARTy in the parks: Connecting Communities, Central Goldfields
A series of community celebrations were held in Talbot, Dunnolly, Carisbrook, Bealiba and East Maryborough (a socioeconomically disadvantaged region). Each aimed to use the arts and artistic activities to address the principles of community building - engage, connect, strengthen, support and celebrate the skills and talents found in the community. All were facilitated by local organising committees comprising of volunteers (several who were participating in the Connecting Communities leadership project) and in some instances community workers. Each celebration adopted a different mix of activities.
The Dunnolly *Heart and Soul* celebration involved performances by local groups, displays of arts and crafts, post and tile painting, workshops (puppet making, pyrography, quilting and wood turning, laughter workshop), free health checks, strength training group, static displays, and talks about local groups.
Talbot's *HeARTy Party* involved buskers, dancing, craft displays, health checks and information, Petanque competition, mural project, bootscooting demonstration, concert of local and imported talents.
The *Bealiba Autumn Festival* involved a photographic competition, garage sales, film screening, arts and crafts displays, gold panning display and community market.
The *Celebrating Carisbrook Festival* involved a children's photographic exhibition and film screening, big brekkie and opening of a new reserve, dancing performances and kite making workshop, picnic tea and bush dance, health checks, laughter workshops, billy cart racing and bike decorating with buskers, musicians and clown. There was a closing ceremony featuring a performance sung by local residents.
East Maryborough chose to provide a range of events over spring organised by public residents. These included a Scarecrow festival, school holiday program, bushwalks, art morning, video, bon fire, singalong, push bike to work, family Halloween disco, family scarecrow making, local wineries, Melbourne Cup festival.

Thong on the Roof: Lead On…, Mildura
This was a short film festival for young people showcasing the work of young people. It was managed by local young leaders with mentoring support by a local community worker.

Fringe Feast: Melbourne Fringe Festival, Fitzroy
Fringe Feast involved Fringe artists conducting a series of art workshops with the residents of Atherton Gardens Estate (a high proportion of whom are from non English speaking backgrounds). The main event was held at Federation Square and involved a free lunch to which the residents and Fringe artists were invited. The tablecloth that was created in the workshops was unveiled and the Atherton Gardens Estate choir sang.

Where the Heart Is: Royal District Nursing Service, Melbourne
This festival was conducted by health and community workers for the homeless or people at risk of homelessness in the city and suburbs of Melbourne. The festival sought to celebrate the skills and creativity of this group in a safe, accepting and

comfortable place. To provide a public space for people to meet and socialise. Activities included music and poetry performances (most were conducted by the homeless themselves), a lifestyles marquee (haircuts, photographs, tarot, numerology, massage, information on services), arts and craft exhibition and stalls, photo booth, free lunch and drinks and children's activities.

NAIDOC Healthy Lifestyles Day: Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative, Ballarat

A healthy lifestyles day (open day) was held at the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative by health workers. The day was used as an opportunity to promote health messages, provide free health checks, as well as employment advice and information from other key service providers and to be entertained by bands and performances.

Ouyen Rain-dance: Ouyen Community

This was a one off celebration that arose out of the need to improve community spirit in light of an ongoing drought. The Ouyen rain-dance ceremony was the main event within a broader family fun day. A women only ceremony was conducted at a secret location. Other activities open to the whole community involved a massive children's treasure hunt, entertainment (including grunge music for young people), celebrities (local and professional) and a free sausage sizzle. It was conducted by a local volunteer group with the support of a paid event manager with a background in community work and music.

Celebrating Difference: Broadmeadows Health Service

A series of events were conducted including a:

- NAIDOC day celebration
- Turkish festival/victory day celebration
- Exhibitions on Arabic rituals

These festivals were open to everyone. They focused on showcasing the cultural traditions, history and folklore of each community group. The festivals were planned and implemented by representatives from each community group in conjunction with the community development manager from Broadmeadows Health Service. The health service also provided the venue, funding and organisational support. Broadmeadows is a suburb of social disadvantage and has a high proportion of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Nati Frinj Festival: Arapalies Community Theatre, Natimuk

The aim of this the second Natimuk festival was to create a vehicle to support local artists and celebrate local diversity (ie farmers, rock climbers, artists) and landscapes using the theme of *space and place*. The main event was a community created performance using the local silos as a performance space. A range of additional activities were held over the course of the weekend including a street parade, short films by the locals about local people and places, art exhibitions, poetry readings, markets, kids activities, historical trail and a spontaneous dance party at the local hall and a festival café. Many of the events involved people telling stories about the environment in which they lived and the people who lived there. It was organised by a committee of local artists.

Horn of Africa Live Night: Horn of Africa Communities Network, Melbourne
This celebration aimed to showcase and celebrate the traditions of each of the four north African countries involved in the Horn of Africa Communities Network. This was achieved through music, performance, arts, dance. There were speeches, food, exhibition of cultural items and practices (eg coffee ceremony), fashion show, drama. The event concluded with a disco for young people. It was organised by committee representatives who were assisted by members of the youth leadership project run by the Horn of Africa Communities Network. This is a new migrant community, with many being refugees.

Loddon's Celebration of Health and Wellbeing: Loddon Prison, Castlemaine
This celebration comprised of sporting competitions between prisoner teams and local community teams, a barbeque lunch for the visiting sport teams and competing prisoners sporting teams, provision of healthy lifestyle information on different health modalities (ie western and eastern) and a whole of prison healthy breakfast and motivational speaker or entertainment. Loddon Prison's recreation officer was the primary organiser with support from a small group of prisoners.

CERES Autumn Harvest Festival: CERES, Brunswick
The festival included harvesting foods from the CERES market, a variety of ethnic community groups using this produce to demonstrate their traditional cooking techniques. Information about growing and harvesting of food and harvest rituals was shared in workshops, talks and performances (which included singing and dancing). The festival culminated in an evening meal, the 'Harvest Fest' where everyone shared the food prepared during the day. This event was organised by paid event managers who sought to actively involve a range of ethnic community groups in their local celebration. CERES is a community of people who seek to model sustainable development. Go to www.ceres.org.au

Art is…: Art Is Festival, Horsham
The medium size festival is a ten-day community celebration offering a diverse program of arts based performances, exhibitions, workshops and films. It is managed by a local volunteer group with the support of a festival director. Each festival addresses a new theme. Community groups are actively supported to become involved. Providing professional development opportunities for local artists and those in gaining technical and event management skills is also a major focus. The 2003 program involved dance (contemporary, traditional, aerial, multicultural), a mass choir, poetry, creative writing, film, visual art, food as art, physical theatre and drama, performances.

Cooking Stories: Belgium Ave Neighbourhood House, Melbourne
Cooking Stories involved a community cultural development worker working with ten different refugee groups. The result was a collection of stories and objects that revealed experiences about the refugee journey and the process of settling in a new home. A series of community lunches and dinners were held where the recipes related to each of the stories were cooked and the new migrants presented their own stories in their own language and English to members of more established migrant communities.

Flying Feathers Festival: Shire of Strathbogie, Euroa
The Flying Feathers Festival drew participation from across the Shire of Strathbogie. The main activities were held in the town of Euroa. This festival sought to revitalise the Wool Week festival and to find ways to involve young people. A Mr/Miss Universe and fashion parade, street parade, community art projects and competitions that challenged gender roles through the use of humour were incorporated to achieve this. The festival was organised by a volunteer committee which included young people.

Mt Evelyn Community Festival: Metic, Mt Evelyn
The Mt Evelyn community festival is linked to other town initiatives that fall under the umbrella of the Mt Evelyn Township Plan. In particular it is seen as a vehicle to develop community leadership. The focus was on families and children. The festival was conducted in a closed off street and included music, banners, photo exhibition, school student activities, community conversations, stalls and festival guides. It was organised by a co-ordination team who was supported by a 'festival coach'.

Berringama Lucyvale Wabba Bash: Tennis Club Inc., Luceyvale
Berrignma, Luceyvale and Wabba are three small rural areas in the Toowong Shire of north eastern Victoria. There is no central town or village, rather a collection of families spread across the valleys. They form a small community of nearly 60 people within a 20 kilometre radius. This celebration was organised to affirm the community's identity in face of recovery from bushfires, drought and adversity. It was organised by community volunteers and involved a range of sporting activities, a barbeque lunch, spit roast dinner and, a band and dancing.

Snowy Errinundra Festival: Orbost Community Development Group, Orbost
The Snowy Errinundra Festival was held over four days and tracked the inaugural Wilderness Bike Ride, a four day event through the small communities in the region. Four events were held. A bush dance on the first evening. The second night showcased local musicians and involved a presentation about the ecology for the region. The third night was a film night and on the last day a band awaited the riders at the end of the final leg of the ride. This event was co-ordinated by the Community Health Service in partnership with a local volunteer group comprising of representatives from sub-communities traditionally been in conflict over the logging of local forests.

Big West Festival: Maribyrnong Festival, Maribyrnong
Big West is a biennial arts festival held on the western outskirts of Greater Melbourne. A socio-economically disadvantaged area with many residents being newly arrived migrants. This is a large scale festival that seeks to provide an opportunity for all residents within the community to participate in a free (or low cost) high quality arts performance program. It seeks to take a positive approach that generates a pride of place and sense of community identity. It is managed by an artistic director. The VicHealth funded component seeks to support community development workers working with selected community groups.

Tarerer Festival: Tarerer - Gunditj Project Association, Warrnambol
This festival seeks to build relationships between local Aboriginal and non indigenous communities. The main event of the Tarerer festival is a concert that showcases local

talent. The festival is managed by volunteers (including arts, elders and community workers).

Mallacoota Arts Festival: Mallacoota Arts Council, Mallacoota
Mallacoota Arts festival is a long running arts festival managed by the Mallacoota Arts Council. In 2003 it underwent a renewal period and became a much smaller more localised festival for the local community. The 2004 festival focused on poetry and involved an artist in residence, community play, talent quest, treasure trail, concert, sand sculpting, art exhibition and auction and poetry at sunset readings.