From Creative Recovery to Creative Livelihoods:
“It’s not just art... it’s a healing thing”

The benefits of an arts based health initiative in remote Indigenous communities

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Arts and Health Terminology

Arts and health can be defined as “Creating art and cultural experiences to improve health and wellbeing.” (Mills, 2011).

It is a field that has grown out of practice, not policy, and which crosses sectoral, professional, theoretical and institutional boundaries. This field operates within a diversity of health models, art forms and settings.

The practice takes place across the range of health care settings and in the community and is represented across the full continuum of health services.

The practice may focus on individuals, groups, communities or professional disciplines.

The practice will have a different purpose and impact depending on the context, training of the arts practitioner and the role of interdisciplinary practice, and may be:

- A therapy or treatment in itself;
- A way of tackling the social and economic determinants of health and building social inclusion;
- As a means of communication and community development;
- A way of creating meaning and a bridge between different social groups;
- A means of individual self expression;
- A means of enriching and enhancing the culture of care in health services;
- A way of improving attention and observation, empathy and communication skills amongst medical and other health staff; or
- As a means for a community to articulate and solve a problem.

Acknowledgements

The ongoing success of Creative Recovery and Creative Livelihoods would not have been possible without the efforts and support of a wide range of individuals and organisations. We would particularly like to thank the communities of Lockhart River, Aurukun, Mornington Island and Doomadgee; the local artists and art centres within the remote communities; and the local shire council’s. Our partners and stakeholders (mentioned in Appendix I of this report) have also played a crucial role in the expansion of this initiative, in particular:

The logo designs

The logo for Creative Recovery came from a painting by Lockhart River artist Patrick Butcher. He describes the meaning of the image: “The Creative Recovery logo I painted represents a new beginning – you see the rising sun coming out of the water, the fish going around inside a circle underneath... that shows how people are confined by their mental state... but the rising sun gives hope that they can come out of that circle.”

As the project expanded to other communities and the focus shifted to embrace the concept of Creative Livelihoods, a new logo was commissioned to represent this shift. “In this one there is no confinement, the fish circles have been released, anything is possible now.”
In remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities where the focus, understandably, is on infrastructure, service delivery and social cohesion, mental health and emotional well-being often slip down the priority list. However, the mental health challenges facing Indigenous Australians in remote parts of our country are as confronting and as potentially destructive as anywhere else in outback Australia.

Alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse, depression, anxiety, social isolation and suicide often go unaddressed in favour of things like housing and municipal services. However, unaddressed mental health issues in remote Indigenous communities diminish individuals and diminish communities. They have the potential to ruin and, indeed, end lives.

And yet, despite these challenges, Indigenous culture survives still, underpinning these remote communities and helping form connections to places and kinship. Cultural activities foster social engagement and emotional well-being and they provide opportunities for creative expression. And, as this report shows, these activities can also foster employment and the dignity that comes with it.

This is the story of how four remote Indigenous communities used creativity and arts-based activities to grow and improve mental health and emotional well-being. It’s the story of how arts-based activities took hold in one community and succeeded – and how the idea spread, albeit slowly, from one community to another.

It’s the story of how the Australasian Centre for Rural & Remote Mental Health (the Centre) formed and developed working partnerships with Indigenous communities, dedicated and talented artists, other NGO’s, and the Queensland Government. It’s a story of positive outcomes and emerging economic opportunities.

Most importantly, it’s a story of hope, one that can be retold by the Centre in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia - in fact wherever there are remote Indigenous communities.

We welcome contact from government agencies, Indigenous organisations, non-government and philanthropic organisations who are interested in exploring the Creative Recovery / Creative Livelihoods approach in other Indigenous communities.

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**Emma Bennison**

CEO – Access Arts Inc.

I am thrilled to have the opportunity to present the journey of participants in the Creative Recovery project in collaboration with remote communities in Far North Queensland, the Centre and others. As you will read and view in the accompanying documentary, the impact on participants has been one of profound transformation through artistic self-expression.

On behalf of Access Arts’ Management Committee and staff, I would like to thank the participating artists and their communities for welcoming us so warmly and contributing so passionately to making Creative Recovery such a success. Without your ongoing commitment, there would be no project and no future for Creative Recovery.

Creative Recovery has been made possible due to three years of pilot funding devolved to Disability Services Queensland (Department of Communities) by Queensland Health, Mental Health Branch. This evaluation report reminds us yet again that there is a need for stable, recurrent funding to ensure that communities are not set up for failure and can plan for the future. We sincerely thank the Department for recognising the importance of a longer-term commitment through the provision of three years of project funding. We look forward to continuing to work toward a more sustainable delivery model in 2012 and beyond. The Tim Fairfax Family Foundation is also strongly supportive of Creative Recovery, having provided funding to enable the completion of the project evaluation. We thank them very much for their generous support and look forward to working with them in 2012.

Too often, when evaluations are conducted around the experiences of people with disability or mental health issues, there is little reflection of the individual’s experiences. Therefore, I would like to thank the project team - Michelle Leenders, Vicki Saunders and Geri Dyer for ensuring that the voices of Indigenous community members and artists who have contributed to this evaluation are at its heart and can be clearly heard. I commend the evaluation to you and trust it will contribute to the growing body of evidence to support the use of arts and creativity to aid recovery.

I look forward to an exciting future for Creative Recovery as we explore the transition of some of the artists from recovery to product development and ultimately, the potential for Creative Livelihoods.
Creative Recovery was implemented as a pilot project in Lockhart River, a remote Indigenous community in Far North Queensland during 2008 as an innovative, community arts-based, wellbeing and mental health recovery project. Over the following three years it evolved from a project focussed on addressing issues of social inclusion specifically for Indigenous consumers of remote mental health services to a broader initiative extending to the communities of Aurukun, Mornington Island and Doomadgee. During this time, over 28 organisations became involved in an effort to promote social and emotional wellbeing for a diverse range of community members. The project also began to explore opportunities for social and creative enterprise within these communities.

This report describes the processes involved in implementing and the outcomes obtained from Creative Recovery, as well as outlining the challenges and future opportunities. Outcomes from the project were evaluated in an evolving way that used yarning/unstructured interviews, weekly activity reports and the production of documentaries. In response to the need to adhere to culturally appropriate methods of enquiry and to enable Indigenous mental health consumers to have a voice, the multiple elements and forms of Indigenous storytelling were incorporated as a way of generating meaningful data in this context.

Several themes emerged consistently across communities as being crucial to the successful outcomes of such a project, including: a sense of ownership; acknowledging that simply engaging in arts-based activities can be healing; the role of engaging in creative activities as a means for promoting pride and identity; the potential for such projects to promote cultural continuity and renewal for the benefit of children; the teaching and acquisition of new skills.

The more tangible ‘returns on investment’ included: 80 workshops in Lockhart River, 14 artists residencies conducted in other communities, 4 major public exhibitions, 8 community launches/exhibitions, and 6 documentaries produced. In addition the projects generated over 300 artworks from amongst the participant groups with 15 emerging artists generating a regular income from the sale of their work. Given the challenges and investment needed to coordinate and initiate similar projects in remote locations these represent significant ‘returns’ for the community, arts organisations and for health services.

In the short term the evaluation has provided insights about the processes which are critical to ensuring the success of such programs and evidence for positive outcomes. In the long term it is envisaged the report will help to inform similar projects or programs geared toward building social capital in remote Indigenous communities through arts-based initiatives. Such programs can lead to improvements in health outcomes for individuals and communities, as well as promoting sustainable local economies. It is acknowledged however, that any economic benefit to participants will need to be carefully managed.

Finally, the project outcomes including the evaluation have made a positive contribution to non-Indigenous awareness, understanding of, and respect for Indigenous culture. It provides an approach to essential maintenance of Indigenous culture and traditional knowledge by engaging with a wide range of community members. The arts and cultural products are also showcased through exhibitions and documentaries in a culturally appropriate and sensitive format.

Executive Summary

Creative Recovery was implemented as a pilot project in Lockhart River, a remote Indigenous community in Far North Queensland during 2008 as an innovative, community arts-based, wellbeing and mental health recovery project. Over the following three years it evolved from a project focussed on addressing issues of social inclusion specifically for Indigenous consumers of remote mental health services to a broader initiative extending to the communities of Aurukun, Mornington Island and Doomadgee. During this time, over 28 organisations became involved in an effort to promote social and emotional wellbeing for a diverse range of community members. The project also began to explore opportunities for social and creative enterprise within these communities.

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Major Outcomes at a Glance

- Several participants have become recognised as artists within their local community.
- A number of participants have accessed other training opportunities in their local communities.
- There has been a positive increase in participation by socially isolated individuals in community events.
- Some participants are now seeking appropriate medical assistance at their local clinic and interacting in more positive ways with the community more generally.
- Community ownership of the initiative has resulted in local investment in continuing the project.
- Documentaries have been created and modules uploaded onto the HitNet touchscreen network.
- A large body of work has been created including three community murals.
The beneficial relationship between art and health has been acknowledged for many years, if not centuries, but the incorporation into policy and practice has in the past been hampered by the lack of a demonstrable evidence base (DADDA, 2008). Increasingly however, there has been a growing acknowledgement that arts and health projects can not only improve wellbeing, but can contribute to improvements in various aspects of Government priorities such as education, community coheseiveness and development, social behaviour, the delivery of health education and crime prevention (APU/UCLAN Research Team, 2005; Working Group on Arts and Health, 2007; Cultural Ministers Council, 2004; White & Angus, 2003). Such projects can also be productive economically contributing to national growth – something governments are always interested in. This cumulative evidence has been reflected by a growing commitment by State and Federal Governments to fund such projects. Perhaps even more importantly, the current Federal Government is seeking to develop a National Cultural Policy and a call for submissions in response to a discussion paper only recently closed in October 2011 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Mills (2011) submitted a response on behalf of the Arts and Health Foundation which comprehensively discusses Australia’s current art and health policy landscape.

As Wreford (2010) outlined, the role of arts and health within Australia has developed through close association with the community arts/community development movement, which can provide a base of activity all directly addressing social determinants of health. This is particularly pertinent to remote Indigenous contexts where the statistics indicate that current social policy has failed thus far to address gross social and health inequities for Indigenous Australians. Art potentially plays a powerful role in addressing some of the social determinants of health that Indigenous people living with mental health illness experience. Art centres in remote Indigenous communities are often the only source of income, as well as providing an important expression of the continuing strength of Indigenous culture. Individuals living in remote communities with mental health problems have a double burden of disadvantage as they often face social exclusion within their own communities which are themselves suffering from severe social and economic disadvantage. Given the limited economic opportunities within these communities, an arts-based project may provide not only social benefits and meaningful activity, but potential economic benefits. (Dyer and Hunter, 2009).

As Dyer and Hunter (2009) further point out: within mental health there is increasing recognition that recovery involves many other facets than simply ameliorating symptoms. Recovery from this perspective, they argue, necessarily involves the fostering of hope, creating a sense of meaning and purpose, developing new coping mechanisms and rebuilding identities. This oft cited shift in the paradigm of mental health care has resulted in innovative partnerships between arts organisations and mental health services. There have already been several international initiatives which have explored the potential benefits of arts and creativity from this perspective of recovery and wellbeing (Hacking, Secker, Kent, Shenton & Spandler, 2007). Research has concluded on the basis of the evaluation of a number of such arts and mental health projects that these initiatives have an essential contribution to make to the future of mental health and social care provision.

These findings also resonate with Indigenous concepts of mental health which is viewed as a broad concept. It includes the social, emotional, cultural, physical and mental wellbeing of the individual and the whole community and is based on current, historical and spiritual values (ATSI Old Mental Health Policy, 1996). Promotion of social and emotional wellbeing is identified as one of the nine priority areas of the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2003-2013; Australian Government Implementation Plan 2007-2013.
Lockhart River, Aurukun, Mornington Island and Doomadgee are all classified by the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) as being part of Very Remote Australia. That is, they have the furthest physical distance from goods and services. Most services provided to these communities are based on a fly in – fly out model.

All of these communities continue to experience disadvantage on a range of key indicators as a consequence, not only of their remoteness, but additionally due to a complex interplay of factors relating to poverty, racism, dispossession, trauma and Government policies (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

According to recent Australian Bureau of Statistics figures the population of each community ranges between 800 – 2,000 with approximately half of the population being under the age of 24. Only approximately 5% of the population is aged over 65 years old (http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/austats).

The idea that eventually became ‘Creative Recovery’ began over 13 years ago. During regular clinic visits to the remote Indigenous community of Lockhart River in Far North Queensland, Dr Ernest Hunter, Regional Psychiatrist in Far North Queensland, witnessed the positive effects that art-making was having on some of the service's clients in the community. In conjunction with Disability Services Queensland, a project was proposed to investigate how this could be extended to other people with disabilities living in a community with limited clinical and non-clinical resources. At this time however, it was unsuccessful in garnering financial support. In conjunction with a growing awareness of the beneficial role of arts in health, there has been an increasing recognition that despite dramatically increased clinical services to remote Indigenous communities there has been no corresponding improvement in social and emotional wellbeing. Hence, there is a clear need to support the development of appropriate non-clinical services. In 2008 Dr Ernest Hunter reconfigured his initial proposal, assisted by his colleague Dr Geri Dyer, and gathered a steering committee of relevant stakeholders from across disciplines, including academic experts in evaluation.

The Healing Journeys Exhibition Exhibition, held at the Tanks Art Centre in 2008 as part of the Centre Biennial Creating Futures Conference, was the first joint initiative between Queensland Health and Arts Queensland. It represented the first step in, and commitment to, the development of an ongoing strong partnership. For the artists who participated in the exhibition, art has played an important part in the healing process – whether from the perspective of a health professional or person who has faced difficulties with their mental health. Three of the six artists who exhibited were from Lockhart River. Some of the artists who exhibited have works in a number of National Galleries and their lives have been changed immeasurably by creative endeavour.

Many of the artists involved in the exhibition participated in discussions about the implementation of Creative Recovery, as an identified priority was to utilise local expertise and skills in the project. Following on from this exhibition, Queensland Health made a commitment to fund the pilot project of Creative Recovery in Lockhart River for three years. A project officer was employed to implement the project plan including developing a sound governance structure to support the management of the project and its evaluation strategy.

After consultations with members of the local Arts Centre and councils, Creative Recovery was then successfully launched in Lockhart River in October, 2008. It involved weekly visual arts workshops for individuals with mental health problems at the local Art Centre, facilitated by artist mentors and the art centre manager. The local RFDS Community Health Engagement Officer (CHEO) agreed to assist the workshop as part of their work plan. Potential participants were referred to the project via the local network and visiting health professionals. The local artist and CHEO started to visit these people in their homes to inform them about the workshops. This personal approach proved to be a vital element to encourage participation once workshops began.

The workshops were enabled by an innovative partnership arrangement between Queensland Health and Arts Queensland under the auspice of Access Arts Inc. (AA Inc.) and the Centre. As other funding opportunities became available, utilising the experience gained in Lockhart River, arts-based health initiatives were commenced in other communities. The project was able to evolve to suit the needs and priorities of these communities by adapting the partnership model already in place and through community consultation.
Aurukun

The extension to Aurukun evolved out of the work being carried out by an Indigenous Mental Health worker (IMHW) from Remote Area Child and Youth Mental Health Service (RACYMHS). She had been working for several months with a group of young men on themes around identity and pride. RACYMHS were aware of the positive outcomes being achieved in Lockhart River from the Creative Recovery Project and wanted to use an arts-based project to celebrate the work of this group. The Centre had funding available for community identified activities in Aurukun which were part of the Pathways to Resilience (P2R) consultation project from the Department of Communities Suicide Prevention Initiative.

A local support network was then established to inform the implementation of Creative Livelihoods in Aurukun. Stage 1 involved the creation of a mural on the shop wall by the group of young men, as a culmination of their work with the IMHW, in December 2009. They were assisted by an Indigenous artist-in-residence and some of the local male artists from Aurukun Arts Centre. A documentary captured the making of this work.

Stage 2 was launched with a different focus based on community needs and capacity. In August 2010 a two week artist-in-residency project was conducted, as a partnership between the Art Centre and the local Health and Community Care (HACC) service. The participants were local female elders at the HACC shelter who had never painted before; they began telling their stories in the artwork they produced. At the conclusion of the residency the elder women expressed interest in continuing to develop skills and experience, especially working in larger formats. As a result, a second mural was planned involving the women to complement the one done by the young men. Although they were often joined by other female family members and friends, it was the elder women, ranging in age from 63 to 87, who took on responsibility for the artistic outcome of the project.

In March 2011 a community launch was held to show the documentaries created during the making of the young men’s and the elder women’s murals and celebrate their achievement. The films were shown at the front of the shop where the murals are painted and attended by the largest gathering the community had seen for many years, testament to the pride and support shown for these projects.

Four more artist residencies were conducted to further develop the skills of the elder women with the same artist-in-residence each time (at the request of the elder women participants). The work of these elder women is deeply personal, depicting stories about special places and rituals which they are now proud to pass on to the next generation. The residencies have involved going out on country to connect with story places and gather materials for making baskets and making ochres – traditional cultural practices are being revived. Younger women have been inspired by their elders and have also participated in the residencies. A senior female artist from the Aurukun Art Centre has been engaged as a mentor during each of the residencies and has passed on her extensive knowledge of traditional practices as well as arts skills.
This Creative Livelihoods extension grew from a partnership between the Centre and GhostNets Australia with funding from the P2R initiative for activities in Mornington Island. The key aim was to engage elder women weavers from Mornington and Bentinck Islands to mentor young women in traditional weaving techniques using recycled ghost-nets collected from the area by the rangers. Ghost-nets are discarded fishing nets which pose a huge environmental risk to local marine life. The wider GhostNets Australia project involves the collection of these discarded ghost-nets and other materials which are then woven to create baskets, placemats, pillows, armbands and bags. These artefacts can then be sold to generate income for the local Indigenous people.

The initial residency in August 2010 inspired other local organisations, such as Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) and the local shire council, to partner with the Centre to offer more creative workshop experiences and opportunities. Two more residencies were conducted and then the PCYC continued to conduct workshops for the wider community. A community exhibition and launch of the documentary made during the initial residency was held in April 2011, this included a cultural exchange residency with weavers from the Torres Straits participating in workshops with the Mornington Island weavers.

Certainly, skills and knowledge were passed on but, perhaps more importantly, the Mornington Island participants who had previously been socially isolated, revelled in the social aspect of the program, renewing past acquaintances and developing new connections and friendships.

Some of the older participants who have been battling substance abuse had refused involvement in previous activities. In this instance, however, they participated happily in the workshops and there was a sense of excitement about returning the next day to complete their work. Improvements in the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the workshop participants have been recognised by all those involved. The local school also became involved and bought groups of school children to the workshops to learn weaving from their elders.
Doomadgee

The remote inland community of Doomadgee faces the same sort of challenges as other remote communities, particularly with regard to young people. Youth Justice Officers have commented that there is a lack of meaningful activities for the community’s young people and this has been identified as a priority. There is also a lack of further education opportunities, skills-based apprenticeships and employment options. Additionally, Doomadgee is the least resourced Gulf of Carpentaria community; it has no Art Centre to support ongoing activity.

Stakeholders have spoken about the potential for livelihoods based on Aboriginal culture, heritage and the arts. There is confidence that new niche markets can be identified for artists emerging from Doomadgee. Margaret Chatfield (artist name M Henry) worked in the gulf region for over six years, initially teaching various courses through TAFE and the Lower Gulf Campus including screen-printing, hospitality training and painting. During this time she became aware of the immense talent for the arts many of her workshop participants were developing. Margaret became the key artist-in-residence to initiate Creative Livelihoods in Doomadgee. The Centre was again able to utilise funding from the P2R initiative for activities in Doomadgee.

The Doomadgee Mural Project commenced in November 2010. Doomadgee State School was a major partner with over 150 school-aged children getting involved, along with a number of local artists, all of whom are descendents of the Waanyi and Gangalidda peoples. Ngooderi Community Services Aged Care Hostel provided the venue and organised the preparation of the wall. The Indigenous film company Traditional Knowledge Revival Pathways filmed the event and also involved school children in the making of the documentary. This added yet another important dimension to the project and paved the way for supervised interaction between elders and students. Elders who were residents at the hostel were clearly delighted to have students visit and join them in cultural activities.

Acclaimed musician, Shane Howard, launched the mural and documentary in Doomadgee in April 2011. Following on from this, Margaret has continued in her role as artist mentor in Doomadgee and Normanton inspiring the small group of local emerging artists to develop skills and art for exhibitions in Cairns and Canberra.
The River Map - Key Project Milestones

During this work in progress there have been exhibitions, community celebrations and launches of the documentaries produced to celebrate the work of the participants in each project. In trying to find a way to highlight key elements of the project story the symbol of a river was utilised as the organising metaphor (Martin, 2001).

As it was acknowledged that the evidence base in this area is still limited, it was also seen as crucial to evaluate the project on an ongoing basis. Hence, it was hoped that the project would make a significant contribution to the body of research which increasingly recognises the role of creativity and arts in promoting wellness and addressing the needs of people with chronic mental illness.

The management of the initiative was underpinned by a sound governance structure and involved the formation of local reference groups in each community to identify specific community priorities, activities and participant target groups (see Appendix 1). Each community was different; the core ingredient of the initiative was the use of creativity to engage with a group of people in a meaningful way to improve social and emotional wellbeing outcomes. This is congruent with community cultural development philosophy as well as participatory and Indigenous research approaches.
Creative Recovery / Livelihoods necessarily adopted a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, utilising a cycle of planning, implementation, reflection and action. PAR is based on the principle that ‘ordinary’ people become researchers in their own right and generate knowledge in order to address issues that are of priority to them. This approach is also consistent with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Ethical Guidelines for Indigenous research which include the following:

- Community engagement (in all phases of the project and evaluation)
- Benefit (for community members and organisations)
- Sustainability and transferability (of project outcomes)
- Building capacity (in community organisations, individuals and in research practices)
- Priority (as identified by the community)
- Significance (as knowledge useful for Indigenous communities)

Hence the evaluation methodology is presented as an approach that is:

- Empowering
- Beneficial
- Strengths focussed

Participants

The target participants for each of the project locations was determined through local consultation and responded to the expressed needs of the community. The local partners referred and organised recruitment of target community members for inclusion in the creative projects. For detailed descriptions of the participation rates and local partners, please refer to Appendix 2.

Lockhart River

The original focus was to engage people in the community with severe mental health problems who were socially isolated. As such, the initial targeted participants were consumers of mental health services who were referred by the local network and visiting health professionals. The group however, was then broadened to accommodate the needs of other community members who were facing a range of challenges to their social and emotional wellbeing.

Aurukun

The first target group identified by the community was Aboriginal young men (aged 10 – 14). The second was a group of elder Aboriginal women who were clients of the HACC Centre aged 63 – 87.

The target group has been further extended to include cross-generational opportunities between elders and young people.

Mornington Island

The target group was predominantly elder women from the community and surrounding Islands with mental health problems, who are socially isolated and / or have physical disabilities. School children were also encouraged to attend the workshops.

Doomadgee

The first target group were school aged children, local artists and local service providers. The second target group were emerging artists from the community. The target group was further extended to include cross-generational opportunities between elders and young people.

Process

As well as providing rich information about the beneficial outcomes for participants, the process of implementing the creative projects provided many important learnings. As the project evolved over time in each community, five significant variables emerged consistently as providing both challenges and opportunities. These related to issues concerning:

- Location: the particular location or space where activities took place
- Activity: the ability for the planned activities to be carried out consistently and reliably e.g. weekly workshops
- Staff: the recruitment of dedicated personnel in the project communities
- Partnerships: management of the partnership model over time
- Participants: the continued engagement of the target participant groups.
Measures
The approach used in the evaluation evolved from a mixed methods approach which was proposed during the project development phase, to one more focussed on the multiple ways that storytelling (Archibald, 1997; Frank, 2000; Hill, 2001; Frank, 2002; Martin, 2008), in particular Indigenous storytelling, can be used as both vehicle (process or method) and artefact (data or evidence) in participatory evaluation and inquiry. Indigenous community members were engaged in all phases of the project, including the development of the proposal and the ways the evaluation has been conducted and interpreted. Ethical approval for the pilot project evaluation in Lockhart River was obtained from the relevant ethics committee. Measures included:

Quantitative:
A questionnaire was developed with the assistance of expert academic researchers aimed at elucidating a range of measures on an individual, family and community level including social and emotional wellbeing and social capital. In exploring the ways in which significant changes could be attributed to the Creative Recovery initiative, five domains of interest were initially identified. Following a review of existing tools used in Indigenous Social Emotional Wellbeing research and in consultation with an expert committee, the initial domains of interest for the evaluation were identified as follows:

1. Housing (living arrangements)
2. Health (self assessed health status)
3. Social and Emotional Wellbeing (Kessler 10 and scenarios adapted from the Growth & Empowerment Measure)
4. Social Inclusion (self assessed engagement in community and family)
5. Land (engagement in caring for country practices)

Qualitative:
Data collection throughout the project took the form of audio tape recording, record keeping, site visit field notes, and weekly workshop reports. This approach was consistent with Indigenous research approaches (Hill, 2001; Lokoko, 2007; Martin, 2008; Wingard & Lester, 2001). A core group of participants, community members and representatives from partner organisations were involved in the creative processes of co-constructing a ‘collective yarn’ (the final documentary/DVD) and in evaluating the project using creative/arts-based research practices. It is anticipated that the reader will watch this production in conjunction with this report. The results from this process will be analysed thematically.

Performative:
A digital record was kept of the workshops and documentaries/digital stories produced which has been deployed on the network of HITNet touchscreen. This can be used as a performative measure in its own right, but also to enhance individual and community self-esteem and to introduce the project to other communities. Art works produced by participants also provided performative outcomes. These creative research outputs have the same ability to interrogate the process as traditional methods. An example of works produced over time by the participants in Lockhart River will be used to illustrate this process.
Challenges and Opportunities
Lockhart River Pilot Project

Challenges

Location: Change of management at the Art Centre impacted on the service delivery in the pilot community. Initially the project was well supported in principal and practice with the Art Centre Manager leading the weekly workshops. The change in management led to the need for alternative arrangements to be implemented for the continuation of the workshops. A coordinator from the community was sourced to assist the local artist to run the workshops and relocate to a different venue – “The Red Shed” across the road from the Art Centre. This venue was not connected to power or water and had no toilet facilities.

Activity: The continuation of weekly workshops was often difficult to maintain due to various factors, for example; community funerals, artists leaving the community and Art Centre closures.

Partnerships: The RFDS Community Health Engagement Officer left the position and was not replaced. The Art Centre management had conflicting philosophies with the aims of the project.

Staff: Change in coordinators due to key people leaving the community affected continuity. Inconsistent commitment from the local artist employed to deliver the workshop was also a challenge. The original plan to employ a support worker was not deemed to be necessary following the change in Art Centre management which in part related to the shift in focus of the Art Centre to be aiming for the “high” end of the Indigenous art market.

Participants: Being able to cater for specific needs of individuals was a challenge as some preferred to work solo and shied away from group activity; others required more physical support due to disabilities.

Opportunities

Location: Creative Recovery became the sole occupants of “The Red Shed” and the participants had a real sense of ownership of the space. There is a possibility of expanding the program to include other target groups and activities depending on identified community need.

Activity: Scoping has started for ideas for short term project based arts activities which can occur over a set period of time with specific target groups e.g. arts residency’s leading to public art works for community beautification; music groups for young people; weaving workshops; cultural dance and song workshops as well as an arts festival.

Partnerships: Closer links have been developed with council and a councillor has been engaged to coordinate the project in community. They have, in turn, arranged for the weekly lunches to be provided in-kind by the local HACC. The local Jobfind coordinator is keen to partner on youth related projects. All this has led to local ownership of the initiative.

Staff: We have sourced a pool of artists to assist in the facilitation of the workshops and developed new partnerships which will aid in maintaining the project.

Participants: New target groups have been identified by different partners.

Closer links have been developed with council and a councillor has been engaged to coordinate the project in community.
Outcomes

Aurukun – Extension 1

Challenges

Location: Aurukun Art Centre is small and was not suitable as a facility to offer ongoing weekly workshops. The Wellbeing Centre was used initially for the young men’s mural design workshops but was also small. The elder women’s residencies took place in the HACC centre and the old tavern site both of which had accessibility and size issues. Coordinating the trips to country required a great deal of time, effort and money to facilitate.

Activity: Weekly visual arts workshops proved not to be an appropriate way to engage with the initial target group of mental health consumers. Further consultation was required to identify community priorities and design suitable projects around these needs.

Partnerships: Some of the original partnerships (RFDS Wellbeing Centre) were compromised when key individuals moved on from their roles leaving the project vulnerable. Flexible service delivery models were established to counteract this to ensure the project could achieve the level of success it has had.

Staff: Reliance on the Art Centre Manager to coordinate and deliver the project “on the ground” was unrealistic. There was limited capacity of local artists and community members to deliver the project without support from the project team.

Participants: Initially, engaging with the target group was difficult without the consistent support of local partners.

There have also been some unexpected challenges in relation to the pressure that earning money has had on the elder ladies and their families. The artist-in-residence and Art Centre Manager in Aurukun has had to apply some protective barriers to shield the elder women from interference from other family members demanding their share of the elder women’s income from the sale of their artwork. This highlights a common issue in remote Indigenous communities which needs careful consideration to ensure the risk of actually doing harm is minimised.

Opportunities

Location: Due to the nature of the arts residencies, the locations have varied depending on what activity was being conducted and have expanded the possible sites for future projects to occur. The Art Centre is soon to undergo a refurbishment which will include a dedicated women’s space. This will be suitable for the elder women to utilise to continue to develop their art practice as part of the Art Centre’s core business, not only during arts residencies. There are also plans to develop the old tavern into a cultural hub for the community which gives rise to further opportunities for Creative Livelihoods to be explored in the community.

Activity: The trips to country to source materials for weaving and making ochres for painting have inspired the participants to preserve and document these traditional practices for future generations. It would seem obvious to build on the momentum gained thus far by encouraging young people to join their elders on country to share stories and skills. These could be represented in paintings or interpreted into dance and song or made into digital stories or documentaries.

Partnerships: The commitment of local partners has been a crucial element in the success of the initiative in Aurukun: the local store, the HACC Centre, the shire council and the Art Centre have all invested in the project and have endorsed the continuation of the initiative as they have witnessed the community benefits first hand.

Staff: The artist-in-residence has consistently and compassionately complied with the needs of the community and has gained the trust and respect of the elder women participants in the project. The senior artist mentor from the community will be able to continue to work with the elder women at the Art Centre and will assist future residencies.

Participants: Shifting the focus of the target group from young people to elder women proved most beneficial in garnering positive engagement in the project. Despite the fact that the elder women had never painted before, given the opportunity to do so in Creative Livelihoods, the Art Centre Manager in Aurukun has been able to successfully market their work and has arranged exhibitions in several galleries around Australia. The elder women are now able to earn an income from the production of art. The artworks themselves are deeply personal depicting stories about special places and rituals which they are now able to pass on to the next generation. The work of the elder women featured in the 2011 Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF), which resulted in many sales and future plans for collaborations with acclaimed senior artist Sally Gabori from Mornington Island. As the residencies have evolved, the target participants have expanded to include young women who have been inspired by the work of their elders and are keen to learn about and preserve traditional cultural practices.
Outcomes

Mornington Island – Extension 2

Challenges
Location: As with Aurukun, the local Art Centre had space issues and was not able to accommodate the workshops in-house. The logistics of transporting and accommodating the women weavers from Bentinck Island for the residencies was difficult to negotiate. The project team identified that clear communication of logistical requirements was an issue that needs to be further considered when working in remote communities.

Activity: The lack of communication between the rangers and the artists resulted in the small stockpile of ghost-net material being burnt just before the second arts residency. The artists spent valuable workshop time sourcing and gathering more material in time for the residency.

Partnerships: Two major considerations were identified. Firstly, how to market the artworks that are produced during the project and, secondly, who has ownership of the micro-business in a multi layered partnership such as this with GhostNets Australia, the Centre, the Art Centre and the PCYC?

Staff: Identifying local coordinators was difficult in the first instance as people in communities are often extremely busy dealing with the demands of their own jobs.

Participants: The women from Bentinck Island are core artists from the Art Centre and had difficulty juggling their responsibilities

Opportunities
Location: The PCYC became the default venue for the residencies, but this actually had a positive effect. The coordinator became personally involved in the project and initiated further residencies and workshops to extend the activity for the community. The Art Centre has also been refurbished and has a shopfront and exhibition space which can be utilised to sell the art products directly to the public.

Activity: The participants began experimenting with different weaving techniques and materials to create jewellery, bags and sculptural pieces. These art products can potentially be marketed and sold to create a small income for the participants.

Partnerships: The baskets and other woven artworks have great appeal in the contemporary art market and there is a need to explore how we can further these partnerships to allow for the development of a sustainable enterprise.

Staff: Many of the local partners who played a key role in the residencies have expressed a keen interest in continuing to use arts based activities within their own service delivery.

Participants: One of the most positive things that came out of these workshops was the interaction between community members and the allied health workers who came along initially to help on the day but ended up making baskets. Since the closure of the tavern there isn’t a place on the island were the two groups can socialise or interact. The PCYC is now one place that the two groups can get together.

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Doomadgee – Extension 3

Challenges
Location: There is no art centre in Doomadgee and very little infrastructure to support ongoing activity.
Activity: A dearth of suitable employment, further education and skills-based apprenticeships found in Doomadgee calls for greater innovation in the development of livelihoods based in that community.
Stakeholders spoke about the development of such livelihoods based on Aboriginal culture, heritage and the arts.
Partnerships: Mt Isa is the servicing hub for health provision in Doomadgee, along with RFDS. New partnerships had to be formed in order to gain access to the regions’ health workers to support the project.
Staff: Local community members are often frustrated with fly-in/fly-out service provision and would like opportunities to develop skills and experience.
Participants: The lack of meaningful engagement for marginalised youth in the remote inland community of Doomadgee was raised by Youth Justice Officers as an area of priority. Jobfind clients undertake work ready training with few opportunities to be employed locally. New niche markets need to be identified for young people living in community.

Opportunities
Location: The building of a new PCYC in the community has opened up potential for more activity in the community. Arts Queensland is also scoping the possibility of establishing an art gallery in the community to meet the needs of the emerging artists.
Activity: Another project proposed for Doomadgee is a second mural to be created with the support of the PCYC and Youth Justice Officers.
Partnerships: Building on the relationship with the school has been pivotal to the successful outcomes for the community. Another important partnership has been formed directly with the shire council in Doomadgee. The shire has requested that a partnership be formed with the Centre aimed at funding future art workshops in the community supporting up and coming artists. With funding received through ‘Indigenous Regional Arts Funding’ one such workshop has already been arranged.
Staff: Local artists in the community have been mentored during the arts residencies to take on coordination roles for future project delivery.
Participants: The local school and council have recognised the value in conducting arts based projects in their community and have requested we conduct public art and community beautification projects. Community elders have also been inspired to ensure traditional cultural knowledge is preserved.

Lessons Learnt
Successful strategies
1. Community ownership / empowerment: Activities were developed in consultation with key stakeholders in the community to ensure they responded to expressed community need.
2. Cultural appropriateness: The project was undertaken with respect to cultural protocols in the community.
3. Awareness raising and safe environments: The community launches and exhibitions were a vehicle to raise awareness of the project outcomes to the wider community and to celebrate the achievements of the participants.
4. Capacity building: Local community members / artists were involved and employed in the implementation of projects.
5. Stronger community partnerships and networks formed: This was achieved by extensive investigation into the myriad of services within communities with a mandate in the field of social and emotional wellbeing.
6. Flexibility in use of funding: Being responsive to unexpected delays caused by weather, illness and lack of local resources was a critical factor in the roll out of the activities.

Areas for Improvement
1. Consultation processes: The project highlighted the need to ensure all stakeholders are informed and consulted in every stage of the activity.
2. Project timeframes: The project was, at times, compromised because it conflicted with other community priorities and events.
3. Development of partnerships: Confusion over project ownership resulted when partnership parameters were unclear.
4. Training: The project emphasised the need to develop relevant training programs in consultation with communities.
5. Sustainability: Future projects need to be designed with long term vision and commitment to ensure communities receive the greatest benefit.
6. Quality of products: The Creative Recovery / Livelihoods model requires production of good quality art products that are marketable in the contemporary art market.

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Thematic Analyses
The initial plan as outlined previously was to collect quantitative data using a tool developed in consultation with an expert committee. During the piloting of the questionnaire in Lockhart River, it became clear that this approach was not appropriate without intensive support and could potentially overlook more useful and critical project outcomes and insights. In commenting on the questionnaire and ways of assessing the project, participants and community members repeatedly referred to the need to make it more about “our way”, “our stories” and “yarning”.

As a result of piloting the questionnaire in Lockhart River and canvassing key community members for evaluation criteria, several core themes were identified as important for assessing the successful impact of the initiative (see Appendix 3: Yarning Themes). These were:

- The need to acknowledge the unique contribution of each community. This related to a sense of community ownership of the project and its connection to a sense of “place” and “belonging”
- Practical and useful outcomes for participants including skills training
- Community pride and identity
- Cultural continuity and renewal for the benefit of children.

Case Study – JR’s Story

Much of JR’s personal story can only be told by him – that is his privilege and his right – but what can be shared is the transformation his community story underwent during the years of the initiative. During visits to Lockhart River he was simply verbally non-communicative, so he never directly verbalised his story. But he did communicate with the project team and other participants. As a representative of mental health consumers in Lockhart River, his question for the project team each time was: When are we doing more painting? The following quotes reflect the impact Creative Recovery has had on this one participant and, in turn, the community of Lockhart River.

Reflections by Patrick Butcher
(local artist and facilitator of Creative Recovery in Lockhart River)

“For me JR and the others are the reason I got things started. Seeing JR lost in a way he didn’t have places where he could go and socialise.

Creative Recovery started with a few participants and we decided to approach JR. We had some yarns. Went and visited him more often. And then suddenly out of the blue he just jumped in the car. From the first moment he put paint to canvas something happened there. I kept going and seeing him and then he came. I’ve known JR since I was little. He was very outgoing - camping, fishing. Then he had that car accident and everything changed. He became isolated; he lost his father, his mum.

For me JR is family. To see someone being treated like an outcast in the community was very disappointing for me. I wanted things to change for the better. So he and the others could have a place of their own they could call. This group is like a little community, a little family. I saw a lot of changes in those three years, from being very quiet to actually starting to make jokes with me. At the shop before, he never used to say hi. The proudest moment for me and Emma when he saw us, he saw we were here and he went straight to the car. He was very happy every time he saw that art centre car.

Each participant here has a very specific need. For JR, have to let him settle in. It takes a while to settle in. We let him do things separately then things started to change. Do group things; I could see that glare in his eyes. His eyes lit up. One week he came he actually shaved. I couldn’t believe it. And now he’s very keen even week in and week out. Every time we drop him off we let him know when the next one is. So he knows.

Throughout the three years he is one of the real success stories. He starting to see family again and socialise. Always he used to keep to himself. Sometimes now you’re sitting and he’ll just come up and approach you. You don’t have to start the conversation. Down the beach that time he was the one that started the jokes and making fun down there.”

Reflections by Community Members

“You can’t put a value on the expression on his face when he saw his painting and his image on the cover of the exhibition catalogue.” A visiting mental health clinician in Lockhart River 2010.

“You should have seen his smile, that slow grin he has. I saw pride.” Community elder, October 2010.

“I noticed a change in him, you know, since it started. It was good when Emma was here. He was more there, you know... himself in a different way. I know he looked forward to Fridays at the Red Shed. He still asks...” Indigenous nurse Lockhart Health Centre, March 2011.

Reflections from Weekly workshop reports

11.9.2009
Patrick observed that JR has come a long way and is confidently taking part in the group work now. Emma added that he has also come to see her when she has been nursing at the clinic – very positive sign of trust and engagement. They both commented that JR is starting to initiate conversation, seems to be enjoying himself, and is comfortable and opening up more now – very good outcome.

7.11.2009
For the first time ever, JR initiated conversation with Emma, by asking questions. This is such a long way from the man who first started and would not even enter the room. JR asked if we could go to the beach so before we dropped them home we drove down and had a look.

5.3.2010
Emma was speaking with JR’s carer. She said it is so good that JR goes to art and seems to really enjoy it. She is pleased that he gets to do something and not just wander around. It was good to hear this feedback and know that she feels the program is beneficial.

28.5.2010
JR continued on the large sun painting. A couple of groups of young people wandered through this week and were very impressed with JR’s work and gave him much encouragement. He has been working on this for a number of weeks now and seemed very proud of the finished product and his achievement. JR didn’t stop for lunch and was reluctant to stop at the end as he was enjoying it so much. The three of us shared lunch together and had a good little chat.
Outcomes

Performative outcomes
The performative elements of the evaluation included:
- The production of documentaries in each of the project locations
- The artworks that were produced and the stories they tell
- The public exhibitions and launches of the arts outcomes
- The photos taken throughout the workshops, at events and exhibitions - some of which feature in this report.

Documentaries
The documentaries produced by Traditional Knowledge Revival Pathways (TKRP) / Mulong have proven to be valuable resources to promote positive images of Indigenous people in remote communities and demonstrate the effectiveness of the creative arts as a tool to meaningfully engage with these people. They enable a “first person” dialogue through use of sensitive interviews with participants who relate their experience, as well as giving people in remote communities the opportunity to use the multimedia equipment to suit their own needs. Many participants highlighted the value of speaking on camera. The making of documentaries as a performative outcome provided a resource which enabled participants and other members of the community to have a voice. Participation in the process of making a documentary proved to also increase self-esteem and confidence which was facilitated by the involvement of an Indigenous film maker. Interestingly, this outcome is consistent with critiques of current evaluation practices raised elsewhere which suggests that evaluation methodologies for such projects needs to take a multilevel approach and specifically enable participants to tell their own story (Kelaher, Curry, Berman, Jones, Dunt, Joubert et al, 2009; Stickley, 2010).

The Artworks
The story within the art produced by participants and their journey through the workshop process contributes a great deal to the evaluation. Many participants made the comment that being able to paint their stories or totems had a powerful and healing effect on them. It enabled increased self-esteem and cultural connection as well as providing a mechanism for passing on traditional stories.

Below are some examples of the group artworks from the participants in the Creative Recovery pilot location of Lockhart River. The artworks depict significant developments in the group dynamics, confidence and ability of the participants as they engaged in the project over the three years.

1. Stormy Weather. This was the first group work that was created in the workshops. The participants were asked to put on canvas how they were feeling about being at the workshop.

The report from this workshop by the facilitating artist, Patrick Butcher, reflected on the difficulty the participants were having in interpreting their feelings in words, but that by using blocks of colour, dots and dashes they could “show” what their thoughts were — scared, shy, muddled, fuzzy, dark — were some of the terms they used.

As a group, they decided to name this piece Stormy Weather as it reflected the mood of the art work and their feelings.

This painting began (or marked the end of) the ‘coming together phase’ for the project team and for participating community members. It represents the first steps towards the establishment of the group at the “The Red Shed” in Lockhart River.

2. Sea Turtle Jigsaw. This artwork depicts a local traditional food source which is associated with significant community events, for example births and deaths. Each participant was given a piece of the turtle to paint in their own style; the final artwork was created when all the pieces were put back together. Each participant had their own personal Sea Turtle story to share when they placed their piece in the puzzle. This was an emotional experience for the participants; it helped the group bond together and support each other.

3. Many Hands, Many Feet. This was painted midway through the project. The idea was to capture the sense of everyone’s achievements during the workshops and they felt the best way to describe it was that it involved many people giving them a hand so they could take steps to feel better about themselves and their place in the community. The participants all contributed to the design by tracing their hands and feet on the canvas and then painted designs and patterns on the images. There was a lot of laughter and story sharing while they created this piece; the use of colour and interweaving of each person’s contribution shows how the participants are beginning to form a close bond and feel freer in expressing themselves in the group.

4. Sun-Up. This was the final group work completed before the Work In Progress Exhibition in September 2010. The idea for this piece came from one of the participants who felt a strong sense “Puuya Kuntha” [strong heart] and wanted to express this on canvas — JR commented that he felt “warmed like being in the sun”. All the participants agreed that
Public Exhibitions and Launches

An important aspect of the evaluation is to measure the broader impact the activities have had in each of the communities. Factoring in public community launches and exhibitions has been integral to creating awareness of the activity and boosting the self-esteem of the participants. Attendance at these events has exceeded expectations and the response from other community members, family and service providers have been positive and affirming for the participants. The community events provided opportunities for the participants to celebrate their achievements and were well resourced with in-kind donations from local services to ensure they were successful.

The Work in Progress Exhibition was the first major public exhibition which was held outside of the remote communities. It was held in Cairns in September 2010 as part of the Centre’s Biennial Conference, Creating Futures. The theme of the exhibition centered on ideas of how recovery – of land and person – is linked to wellbeing and encouraged by social connectedness. It examined “what makes us ("us" being land, sea and people) feel better”. The title, Work In Progress suggests the notion of an ongoing journey, as our research has shown that there is no end point to recovery – it evolves as circumstances and environments challenge and change. The exhibition was an important milestone in the development of the Creative Livelihoods model, which embraces social enterprise to benefit participants in the project. People in remote Indigenous communities have very few opportunities to achieve financial stability and meaningful employment, and using their creativity is a way of engaging some members in the community in activities which may lead to developing a niche enterprise and greater control over their lives and livelihoods.

The Artists of Normanton and Doomadgee Exhibition was another major public event outcome, held at the Tanks Art Centre in August 2011, of the Creative Livelihoods extension in those communities. Artist-in-residence, Margaret Chatfield, worked with and mentored local emerging artists to develop works for this exhibition. Some of these artists then had their works chosen for an exhibition in Canberra. These events have highlighted the talent of the emerging artists in the region, inspiring Arts Queensland and UMI Indigenous Arts organisation to consider investment to support their careers.

Outcomes

they would work on a structured image of glowing sun as it best interpreted their feeling of warmth and solidarity. The controlled use of colour and focused design are a reflection of the self-confidence the participants had gained in the project. The group then adopted this image as their new totem.

This phase was an intensely reflective phase for the project team. For the community this was a phase of asking and answering questions about how to continue the initiative locally with less intensive support from outside. Many organisations were engaged in these discussions. The narrative of Sun-Up is about a sun coming up in an ever renewing cycle. It reflects collectively a renewed understanding of the "red shed" as "our way" or "Lockhart Way" and of "Puuya Kuntha" and "Alinya" as words that better reflect a Lockhart understanding of mental illness and recovery.

It is in the spirit of Puuya Kuntha, that this evaluation approaches assessment of Creative Recovery as an Indigenous art in health initiative. It is appreciative and strengths focussed. A lot of people contributed to the endeavour and each contributor stated they gained something from it - whether directly or indirectly.

This painting was used for the Work In Progress Exhibition at the Creating Futures conference held during 2010 in Cairns. On the catalogue cover JR is viewed from above painting Sun-Up. This catalogue, when shown to Lockhart River community members evokes many smiles and stories about JR. In listening to these stories, new understandings about the role of the initiative have emerged.
Discussion

The current Federal Government recently released a discussion paper calling for submissions regarding the development of a National Cultural Policy for Australia (www.culture.arts.gov.au). This paper not only restated the Government’s commitment to Closing the Gap in health and social inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, it also acknowledged the integral part that creative expression has played in Australian Indigenous history - one of the world’s most enduring cultures. Explicitly accepted, through the development of this policy, is the intrinsic value of arts and creative activity. This, as the paper argues, extends not only to the creation of a strong Australian culture, but to the supporting, enabling and strengthening of communities. There is also compelling evidence for the value of arts and creativity in building resilience and identity particularly in regional and Indigenous communities (Australia Council, 2010; Mills, 2011). Creative Recovery has hence provided some additional evidence to support this position.

Further, the aims of Creative Recovery are clearly in line with the strategic framework outlined in this paper:

• To ensure that what the Government supports – and how this support is provided – reflects the diversity of a 21st century Australia, and protects and supports Indigenous culture.

• To encourage the use of emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries, and that enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture.

• To support excellence and world-class endeavor, and strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australians’ stories both here and overseas.

• To increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p12).

Specifically focusing on the Arts in Health field, Mills (2011) argues strongly that there needs to be recognition of arts and health practice as a legitimate and established cultural practice in the National Cultural Policy. She calls for the development of an Arts and Health Policy and Strategy based on principles of diversity, flexibility and sustainability. Creative Recovery joined the Arts and Health Foundation’s invitation to share experiences and stories to be added to those being collected from around Australia to map the stories about how and why the arts are so important to community and wellbeing (http://ps3beta.com/community/ArtsAndHealth). There will be a National Arts and Health Policy forum in Canberra in the first half of 2012. Creative Recovery is looking forward to contributing to this discussion.

Creative Recovery/Livelihoods represents and illustrates a partnership model that initially focused on improving social and emotional wellbeing for consumers of mental health services within remote Indigenous communities. The foundation partnership between Queensland Health and Arts Queensland was an important acknowledgement of, and commitment to, the intrinsic benefit to health of engaging in creative activities. It is hoped that such partnerships will become increasingly important as the role that art and creativity can play in social and emotional wellbeing becomes an integral part of mental health promotion. Over time, Creative Recovery developed to be a community initiated, creative social enterprise which enabled development opportunities through a facilitated and coordinated network of support from relevant arts, health departments, non-government and community organisations. Despite the challenges of evaluating such a project, it has – on the basis of participants and other community members’ testimonials – overwhelmingly demonstrated the importance of giving individuals within these disadvantaged communities an opportunity to speak for themselves and a sense of ownership.

The idea of promoting wellbeing and recovery outcomes for Indigenous Australians living in remote communities, using social and creative enterprises and activities is not new; it has worked in many other places before and is often embodied in the art centre within communities. Essentially Creative Recovery aimed to explore and evidence social change through the use of community based and driven creative initiatives. The underlying aim was to support innovative approaches to cross-disciplinary rural and remote creative endeavours that focus on a certain target population deemed in need of opportunities for social inclusion. In this case, the original identified groups were consumers with a severe mental health illness; Lockhart River was the pilot site. The outcomes and processes at this site are related directly and indirectly to the outcomes and learnings that emerged at other community sites involved in the initiative. The targeted participants broadened to include a diverse range of individuals in line with community feedback.

The importance of enabling the growth of an Indigenous consumer and carer voice, however, remains a priority and it is hoped with the strengthening of new partnerships in the future, this aim will continue to be fostered. Creative Recovery/Livelihoods has provided evidence that non-clinical services can be vital to the recovery of Indigenous consumers with mental health problems. There is a clear role for the project in working alongside expanding programs such as the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PHaMs). This is particularly important in these contexts, as recent research seeking to provide hard information on the prevalence of psychotic disorders in this population has confirmed that high rates of complex mental illness are common, particularly amongst young adult Aboriginal men (Hunter, Gynther, Anderson, Onnis, Groves & Nelson, 2011). The challenge remains to successfully engage this group in a meaningful way.

One of the primary strengths of the initiative was the clear sense of community ownership which emerged in all project sites. Many community members and participants cited the need for such projects to broaden their focus from the visual arts to other activities which would not only be culturally relevant such as dancing, singing and weaving, but which would enable participants to develop skills which could be utilised as a livelihood. It is therefore hoped that in the future, formal links can be established with institutions such as TAFE to recognise this aim.

While community ownership was identified as being important, the ability of a project such as Creative Recovery to be sustainable was facilitated by the engagement of a project officer who could work with communities to develop appropriate initiatives. Funding opportunities could be accessed and learnings from other communities’ experiences could be passed on. The presence of an experienced broker and partnership manager is therefore seen as critical to the successful cross sectoral partnerships in arts and health. The ongoing funding of a project team is therefore seen as an essential factor contributing to the success of such a project.
Creative Recovery was also able to engage a broad range of young people within these remote communities. Many of the outcomes on a range of indicators are extremely poor for this group and the lack of meaningful activities was consistently identified as a significant concern across communities. The statistics relating to the over representation of Indigenous young people in juvenile detention is only one disturbing sign of this problem, as well as the failure to reach educational success (Richards, 2011). As was so often cited by participants, keeping culture and stories alive for young people is a community priority. Arts and creative activity should also be a fundamental part of the school curriculum.

There has been recent evidence that fostering creativity at a young age will foster the foundations for a resilient population, armed with capacities for critical inquiry, lateral thinking, innovative solutions and powerful communication (Ewing, 2010). While there has been a recent shift in curriculum in some Cape York schools to a focus on numeracy and literacy, these other skills should not be neglected. Indigenous young people should be able to have the opportunity to participate and train in the creative enterprises through an appropriate local curriculum, as this has the potential to vastly improve social, economic, health and wellbeing outcomes (Australia Council, 2010; Mills, 2011; Regional Arts Australia, 2009).

The following table highlights the potential future for a project such as Creative Recovery, as based on community identified priority areas and suggestions for continuation of activities in three of the original project locations. The partners have indicated a willingness to support the activities and contribute to the ongoing sustainability of the initiative in their community. Each community has identified resources and local personnel capable of assisting the activities. It should also be noted, that the project team was recently contacted by two other remote Indigenous communities requesting their involvement in developing creative projects. These two communities have heard about the successes of Creative Recovery/Livelihoods and wish to utilise the same methodology with identified target groups, particularly young people.

### Table of Capabilities

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<td>School aged children.</td>
<td>School holiday arts projects e.g. filmmaking, music and dance.</td>
<td>Retention of traditional cultural knowledge. Skills development. Films, C.D.’s, performances, artworks.</td>
<td>As above plus local school. PCYC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School aged children.</td>
<td>School holiday arts projects e.g. filmmaking, music and dance.</td>
<td>Retention of traditional cultural knowledge. Skills development. Films, C.D.’s, performances, artworks.</td>
<td>PCYC. Wellbeing Centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School aged children.</td>
<td>School holiday arts projects e.g. filmmaking, music and dance.</td>
<td>Retention of traditional cultural knowledge. Skills development. Films, C.D.’s, performances, artworks.</td>
<td>PCYC. School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School aged children.</td>
<td>School holiday arts projects e.g. filmmaking, music and dance.</td>
<td>Retention of traditional cultural knowledge. Skills development. Films, C.D.’s, performances, artworks.</td>
<td>PCYC. School.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following overarching strategies will underpin the continuation of the Creative Livelihoods initiative outlined in the previous table. They draw together the experience of the past three and a half years and are sensitive to the needs of the communities and partners involved in the implementation. Each of these strategies has associated goals and objectives, milestones, key performance indicators and measures of success to ensure they are realistically achievable. A risk management strategy has also been developed and will continue to inform the project.

- Continuation of appropriate governance structure to ensure effective partnerships are maintained between lead organisations.
- Strengthening of local relationships (especially with the councils, art centres and schools etc.) to ensure effective working relationship with Community Development Program and a local sense of ownership to support sustainability.
- Continue to explore opportunities for new partnerships with organisations and individuals to strengthen and extend the initiative.
- Utilise and employ local expertise and resources through partnerships previously established in each community.
- Build capacity locally through formal and informal mentorship, recognised training opportunities (TAFE), and skills development.
- Develop a business plan for the marketing and promotion of the arts and cultural outputs of the activities in partnership with identified stakeholders including:
  - exhibitions and community launches;
  - community markets and festivals;
  - and an online digital market place.
- Scaffold the enterprise activities with financial management programs for community participants and artists.
- Coordinate regular information sharing forums to inform key community members about the role and function of arts and cultural livelihoods initiatives.
- Focus on activities which promote the maintenance and preservation of traditional cultural knowledge and inter-generational story sharing.
- Continue to evaluate and document the outcomes of the initiative to ensure it has currency and relevance to all stakeholders.
- Continue to advocate on behalf of arts and health based initiatives through representation at appropriate forums, conferences, symposiums and other events.
- Continue to provide positive images of remote Indigenous Australians in the mainstream media.

One of the ongoing challenges in working not only within remote Indigenous communities, but within the art in health field generally, is sustainability of projects. Indeed an Aboriginal Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist made the comment that: “there have been more pilots for Indigenous projects than Qantas” (Milroy, 2011). The short term project-focused design of most funding for art in health programs has also been identified as an issue which “consistently interrupts cultural development practitioners from fully realising the social impact of their work” (Marsden & Thiele, 2002, p69). In line with this there has been recognition from the Australia Council for the Arts of the need for long-term support and engagement with communities through new six year funding for key community arts and cultural development organisations (Wreford, 2010). Creative Recovery / Livelihoods has managed to flourish despite the lack of security obtained from long-term funding. It has managed to be successful in opportunistically applying for funding on the basis of the project’s record. It is hoped however, that the successes of this initiative thus far can be built upon more confidently and sustained by longer-term funding in the future. Such endeavours are clearly in line with current Federal Government policy direction.
Recommendations

Funding:
Long-term funding needs to be sought as a priority to ensure:

- Sustainability and ongoing community development through multiple creative mediums.
- The employment of a project management team.

Evidence:
Ongoing efforts need to be made to demonstrate outcomes for such projects and to support development of research capacities within these communities. However, the focus needs to shift from demonstrating clinical outcomes, to the acknowledgement of the intrinsic value in engaging in such activities and to give participants a voice.

Ongoing focus on individuals with mental illness:
There is clear evidence that such approaches can engage individuals with severe mental illness, but consideration needs to be given to how this can be achieved in different communities and how there can be collaboration between other programs in these communities such as Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PHaMs).

Young Indigenous people:
The future focus of creative recovery should be broadened to be inclusive of all community members, as the potential to transmit culture from elders to young people in the community was identified as a clear advantage of art in engaging in such activities and to give participants a voice.

Workforce development:
Formal links with institutions such as TAFE should be sought to enable ongoing skills development and qualifications.

In their own words:

“It’s about the community people actually running their own programs and something that can empower the community in general and give strength to our people. It’s not only art, it can be camping, artefacts, weaving, even corroboree like how we always tell our stories generation after generation. It’s great to see all the different programs in various communities. It can give the outside world a view of what we do in our community with our own people running and supervising our own programs. Taking the responsibility to get these programs set up... it’s great for young mums and even school holidays – kids can get involved. These programs can be catered for various means within our communities. I’m very happy that other communities have realised the potential of this project and set up their own. I hope other communities out there in our beautiful island nation take up this project and develop their own in their community to suit their needs because this program, it worked wonders.”

Patrick Butcher – Lockhart River artist.

“I like it to go further, I think we need more song about our land, more song about the beach, more song about the hunting and fishing and going over to the old site... every time you see something you sing... it’s your place. No more run by Government we try to do things ourselves and we have to be strong to do things ourselves – you can’t depend on Government all the time.”

Irene Namok – Lockhart River artist / former participant.

“For these Government programs to actually work in community, you have to have someone inside the community who actually knows about these things. It’s important to get the needs of the community across to Government – this is what’s happening in our community, this is how we can work this way, not you telling us you have to work that way, we have to tell you it will work this way.

When introducing these programs you have to be able to teach or skill up people in the community... skill up some of them local kids, that way that thing can continue, there’s always someone in the community that got the skills.”

Nancy Stevens – Wellbeing Puuya Centre Coordinator in Lockhart River.

“It should continue, we need to help people in the community with disabilities. You can’t run away and hide from families like that. It’s important. Believe me, in a couple of years time there will be people from the arts recovery selling paintings at the CIAF Indigenous Arts Fair!”

Josiah Omeeny.

“Indigenous elders all over Australia have got this natural ability to talk strong and talk proud for country because a lot of knowledge is there from their traditional knowledge. This allows them to talk really strong and it’s been cultural practice for thousands of years, to be strong, to learn wisdom, to learn knowledge and be able to talk for their own country. So by using video cameras and getting kids to talk about their stuff on video and doing the work that they’re doing here today, it’s all about doing it in a modern sense, of trying to get our young people to talk strong so we’re building these elders for the future to be confident... talk about their country, talk about their community and to talk about the importance of social things just like this and how it’s going to benefit for the future for our next generation to come.

These are important projects, it’s important to remember that it’s not just a simple art project, there’s a lot more that spreads across the board. It’s about bringing in different skills and getting the kids learning and doing it in a fun way, doing it in way where the kids are enjoying themselves... where you give something back to the community, so that other members of the community can get involved and you can leave something behind as well for many years to come so the community can enjoy that as well.”

Victor Steffenson – Cultural advisor / filmmaker.
Appendix 1 : The Partnership Model

One of the key strengths of this initiative has been the continued investment made by the key partners throughout its evolution. The project team was able to identify and secure commitment from a network of stakeholders with a vested interest and a mandate to deliver services to meet needs of people in remote Indigenous communities. The partnership model was a mutually beneficial arrangement as it gave access to information and resources, funding and marketing opportunities, access to key people and a local skills base, and culturally appropriate networking.

The following table provides detail of the various partnership contributions (cash or in-kind) over the life of the initiative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partners - Location</th>
<th>Contribution – Strategic, Cash or in-kind</th>
<th>$ Cash</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Queensland Health Mental Health Branch - Brisbane  
Department of Communities - Community Mental Health Branch | Cash: Project costs over 3 years  
Strategic: Steering Committee | $335,000 |
| Queensland Health - Remote Area Mental Health - Cairns | Strategic: In-kind project management  
Project Concept: all committees | $50,000 |
| Queensland Health - Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service - Brisbane | Cash: Project implementation  
Strategic: Steering Committee | $5,000 |
| Disability Services Queensland - Brisbane and Cairns | Cash: Start up evaluation costs  
Strategic: Service Agreement for project funds devolution;  
Steering Committee | $20,000 |
| Arts Queensland - Cairns and Brisbane | Cash: Artists and exhibition costs over 3 years  
Strategic: Steering & Evaluation Committees | $45,000 |
| Access Arts Inc. (AA) - Brisbane and Cairns | Strategic: Auspice project funds over 3 years; employ  
Project Officer; all committees | $50,000 |
| Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health Queensland - Cairns | Cash: Project extension to other communities  
Strategic: In-kind evaluation assistance; office base for  
Creative Recovery Project Officer; all committees | $50,000 |
| Department of Communities – Suicide Prevention Initiative / 
Pathways to Resilience | Cash: Project extension activities in Aurukun, Mornington Island  
and Doomadgee | $200,000 |
| Remote Indigenous Art Centres – Lockhart River, Aurukun and 
Mornington Island | Strategic: In-kind assistance to coordinate the arts workshops and  
identify local artists to employ; all committees | $20,000 |
| Royal Flying Doctors Service - Cairns / Lockhart River/ Aurukun | Strategic: Non-clinical support to project participants; peer /  
mentoring for Creative Recovery worker; all committees | $20,000 |
| Traditional Knowledge Revival Pathways - Cape York | Strategic: Documentary production | $20,000 |
| Tim Fairfax Family Foundation - Brisbane | Cash: Finish final evaluation products | $10,000 |
| Department of Health and Aging – Funding devolved to 
Access Arts Inc. | Cash: Support artists residencies / mentorships | $5,000 |
| TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS CASH | | $620,000 |
| TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS IN-KIND VALUE | | $210,000 |
Lockhart River Pilot Project (October 2008)

Local Partner Organisations
- Lockhart River Arts Centre
- Lockhart River Health Action Team
- Lockhart River Home and Community Care Service (HACC)
- Lockhart River Shire Council

Participation
The figures in the graph (right) reflect the success of the workshops in terms of engaging with the target groups. The workshops were well supported at a local level and driven by the needs identified by the stakeholders. The workshops generated great interest from the target groups as shown by the retention rates of participants. Local artists were actively involved in the workshops as either paid facilitators or artist mentors for the participants. Community members were also employed to assist the artists coordinate the workshops. The spike in numbers at 55 – 70 weeks is related to the timing of the major public exhibition held in Cairns Work In Progress. The drop off after was due to the inability of the local artists to continue to deliver the workshops due to other commitments with the Art Centre in Lockhart River.

Aurukun Extension (November 2009)

Local Partner Organisations
- Wik and Kugu Arts and Craft Centre (Aurukun Arts Centre)
- Aurukun Home and Community Care Service (HACC)
- Aurukun General Store
- Aurukun Shire Council
- Community Development Officer – Department of Communities
- Aurukun State School

Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2009</td>
<td>Young Men’s Mural</td>
<td>Artist mentors = 3 men (aged 45 – 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School children = 10 boys (aged 10 – 14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2010</td>
<td>Arts Residency 1</td>
<td>Artist mentors = 2 women (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HACC elders = 5 women (aged 67 – 87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2010</td>
<td>Elder Women’s Mural</td>
<td>Artist mentors = 2 women (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HACC elders and family members = 23 women (aged 7 – 87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2011</td>
<td>Arts Residency 2</td>
<td>Artist mentors = 2 women (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HACC elders = 5 women (aged 67 – 87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 March 2011</td>
<td>Community Launch</td>
<td>Artist mentors = 2 women (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HACC elders = 5 women (aged 67 – 87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local community = 80 people (aged 18 – 80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Children = approx 50 people (aged 0 – 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Arts Residency 3</td>
<td>Artist mentors = 2 women (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HACC elders = 5 women (aged 67 – 87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2011</td>
<td>Cairns Indigenous Arts Fair</td>
<td>Artist mentors = 2 women (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HACC elders = 5 women (aged 67 – 87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2011</td>
<td>Arts Residency 4</td>
<td>Artist mentors = 2 women (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HACC elders = 5 women (aged 67 – 87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Young people = 10 women (aged 8 – 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2011</td>
<td>Arts Residency 5</td>
<td>Artist mentors = 2 women (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HACC elders = 5 women (aged 67 – 87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Young people = 10 women (aged 8 – 18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2 : Local Partnerships and Participation

Mornington Island Extension (August 2010)

### Partner Organisations
- GhostNets Australia
- Mornington Island Arts Centre
- Mornington Island Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC)
- Mornington Island Shire Council
- Woomera Aboriginal Corporation
- Mornington Island Home and Community Care Service (HACC)

### Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 2010</td>
<td>Arts Residency 1</td>
<td>Bentinck Island weavers = 5 women (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PCYC Party Girls = 9 women (aged 20 – 54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nursing home = 3 women (aged 70+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School children = approx 40 (aged 10 – 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2010</td>
<td>Arts Residency 2</td>
<td>Bentinck Island weavers = 5 women (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PCYC Party Girls and young mums = 28 women (aged 17 – 54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nursing home = 4 women (aged 70+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2011</td>
<td>Arts Residency 3</td>
<td>Bentinck Island and Torres Strait Islander weavers = 12 women (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PCYC Party Girls = 20 women (aged 20 – 54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School children = approx 65 (aged 10 – 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local community = 60 people (aged 18 – 67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 April 2011</td>
<td>Community Exhibition</td>
<td>A wide range of community members attended the opening and helped with the organisation of this. Very young to over 80 years of age.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Doomadgee Extension (August 2010)

### Local Partner Organisations
- Manager of Community Development - Doomadgee Council
- Local artists in Doomadgee
- PCYC Doomadgee Council
- Team Leader - Doomadgee Community Health Service
- Ngoooderi Aged Care Hostel
- Doomadgee School

### Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2010</td>
<td>Mural Project</td>
<td>School children = approx 150 (aged 5 – 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local community = 15 people (aged 24 – 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community elders = approx 12 (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April 2011</td>
<td>Community Launch</td>
<td>School children = approx 200 (aged 5 – 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local community = 40 people (aged 24 – 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community elders = approx 12 (aged 55+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2011</td>
<td>Arts Residency 1</td>
<td>Emerging artists = 12 men and women (aged 23 – 62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local community = 15 people (aged 24 – 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Arts Residency 2</td>
<td>Emerging artists = 12 men and women (aged 23 – 62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local community = 15 people (aged 24 – 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2011</td>
<td>Exhibition in Cairns</td>
<td>Emerging artists = 12 men and women (aged 23 – 62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local community = 15 people (aged 24 – 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Audience = approx 1400 general public visited the exhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2011</td>
<td>Exhibition in Canberra</td>
<td>Emerging artists = 6 men and women (aged 23 – 62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local community = 15 people (aged 24 – 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Audience = approx 800 general public visited the exhibition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 : Yarning Themes

The following themes were identified from interviews with the community and participants.

1. It’s a healing feeling

“I like it, I like painting. I feel better now, no more sick, I’m happier too now with all our mob here. I finally start painting and I feel better than ever. My daughter she surprising on me too, she said ‘Mumma you painting’ I said ‘Yes I’m back now, no more sick anymore’ I joined them old girls here and I proud of it too. I feel proper happy inside me and my tears run out my eyes, I small cry because I been that girl... I used to be that girl too... I feel so happy now and everyone can get together be part of that program.”

Irene Namok – Participant / Lockhart River artist.

“You know brother all the painting what we do they represent different things. I have that feeling, you know, that healing feeling. It calms you down, painting is good, it calms you down. Art Recovery is not only about painting, it’s about... elderly people of different ages, and with disability that comes to work in that program... we get Puuya Kuntha, that strong mind, strong heart.”

Josiah Omeenyo – Artist, Lockhart River.

“It (the workshop) was a wonderful gathering for women to sit, talk and laugh. The workshop had women discussing all sorts of things and was very positive. It had non-Indigenous women and Indigenous women joining together and enjoying being together as one. One woman who drinks a lot came every day, including the weekend, it was amazing, and everyone was energised and totally buzzing.”

Trudy Ives (PCYC Coordinator) commenting in an interview with Sue Ryan on the positive mental health outcomes and increased self-esteem experienced by workshop participants.

“The participants themselves are actually unaware but they are actually helping themselves by coming along to the workshops and learning skills that they thought they never had, they are more outgoing, more open. Creative Recovery helped me unwind at the end of the week. Helped me with my artwork. Broadened my horizons, sometimes I feel lost when I’m here doing my art, that’s my domain (not like at the art centre where I’m producing something) this is thinking time, relaxing with people, where my real ideas come from... Creative Recovery is still a major part of my life even though I’m focusing on art now. I’m using what I learned from Creative Recovery in planning for other things like the return to country meeting going on. I want to stay on country.”

Patrick Butcher – Lockhart River artist.

“You can see the joy that they get because this is a place where they belong; they don’t have to hide their illness, so to speak. They feel like they are contributing and breaking that barrier of the stigma around mental health, and there is a stigma in Indigenous communities.”

Karen Coca, an Indigenous senior health worker at the Lockhart River Clinic commenting on observed changes in the participants who were also mental health clients.

“We headed down the beach for lunch. JR had requested to me during the week to have lunch at the beach on Friday. It was the anniversary of her husband’s passing this week. She expressed how hard it has been... I think she pushes herself to come along to the workshops as she knows it helps her. She spoke of how she wished more people would come rather than doing nothing. It was a great day to end with. The combination of painting, watching the dancing and having lunch together was really enjoyable. It was difficult saying goodbye to Kevin (or Yarwoh (not the right spelling) as he always says to me, meaning goodbye in language) but also rewarding when I think back to how he was 18 months ago. The workshops must continue so other people can experience the wonderful rewards I have experienced that have brought me so much joy.”

Emma Hodges – Creative Recovery Coordinator in Lockhart River for first 2 years.
2. Pride and Identity/Puuya Kuntha (strong heart/spirit)

“You have to be Puuya Kuntha – Strong Heart – to be and go ‘No more shame now’ shame no good, too much shame, nothing, you can do nothing, put the shame behind you, and you have to be that person. I proud of myself of my speaking, how I speak and when I talk for camera it make me feel strong inside it make me want to talk more and have Puuya Kuntha too – strong heart inside.”

Irene Namok from Lockhart River reflecting on the confidence she gained from talking on camera.

“In the past we used to see people with mental disability and we need to do something, to me they were treated as the outcasts of the community, in my eyes, they were our countrymen, our people... So I took on the responsibility to help them... to balance my time between doing art and Creative Recovery. It was a great experience for me as well. I got a lot satisfaction from doing Creative Recovery, it made me a better person. We get inspired by each and our surroundings, our lifestyle... We have mutual respect for each other and for our elders... Puuya Kuntha... it means healthy mind, health body, healthy country – strong heart – go with your heart, mind and soul, with the spirit of the country, and we all connect as one.”

Patrick Butcher – Lockhart River artist.

“I was on my way to the shop when I noticed this beautiful painting, I felt really proud and I knew my mother is one of the painters. It makes the community feel proud too because this is our land, traditional land stories. It livenes the community up too, makes it look good. The younger ones see the old ladies there doing the painting and maybe one day they will do that to.”

Aurukun community member reflects on the mural by the old women.

“The important thing was to give hope, a sense of empowerment and regaining their identity within this sort of community structure, which can otherwise be quite depressing at times. It’s been quite a positive experience all around building relationships between the local artists, the kids and the community in general, it allowed are meaningful and deeper connection to be made”.

Zane Saunders – Indigenous artist-in-residence, reflecting on his involvement with the Young Men’s Mural project in Aurukun.

“It was an incredible experience, not only have the ladies enjoyed themselves, but everyone in town has been amazed as well... lots of positive feedback from young people, old people, Indigenous, non-Indigenous... everyone has commented on what a wonderful job the ladies are doing and how inspiring it is to see them. It is obvious that because of these Creating Livelihoods Workshops the participants are becoming involved more and more in other workshops and the Art Centre and their income from their creations are increasing. The exposure at CIAF to a huge range of learning and new experiences, including meeting other artists and people who appreciate their creations has had a huge effect on their confidence and wellbeing. Through their participation in this project the ladies have been able to get out of their community and participate in areas that they would never have dreamt of before these workshops began.”

Gina Allain – Artist-in-residence, Aurukun elder women’s projects.

“By using art in this way it’s more than just a mural, it’s passing on skills and knowledge and sharing stories that people have. It’s trying to find ways to make the community feel proud on a larger scale, to show them that they too have the knowledge and skills to keep them strong.”

Che Stow – an Indigenous child and youth mental health worker for Queensland Health (Remote Area Mental Health Team).

“We had a discussion about walking away and ignoring people who tease them. I got the opportunity to bring up things that make us strong, like the totems they had drawn on the wall. We talked about how everyone worked together to create a painting that will be seen by thousands of people for years to come. The boys were as proud as punch, and started to talk about who painted what, and how all their families had commented to them how much they love the mural. On a personal level, working at the clinic I often see the worst of Aurukun, and can sometimes get bogged down in the negativity and perceived hopelessness of the situation. Being involved in the project over the last few weeks has been such a positive, energising experience. It was amazing to see how you engaged the boys and married the concept of art and self worth together. I even learned something myself. I think that the work with the children is one of the most important aspects of work in the community. With the changes in the community, especially the alcohol reform - this is the time to encourage and promote the development these kids. If we continue the way we are, I think the future of Aurukun is going to be amazing.”

Josh Stafford – Clinical Nurse Consultant, Aurukun Primary Health Care Service.

“That’s my totem, that bird the ‘tull tull’ (pointing at the crow in mural), I painted it on the wall and now every time I see him there I feel good inside me, happy too.”

One of the young men who participated in the Young Men’s Mural project.
3. We get strength from our elders and keep our stories alive

“When you sit and yarn with people about the artwork they are doing, you find out the story of the work is often the most important thing for them. My research has shown that this method of enquiry provides a rich source of evidence about the value of creative arts projects in remote Indigenous communities. What I’ve learnt from Creative Recovery is the preciousness of the stories and the ways that we use evaluation techniques to incorporate these stories in different ways. In arts informed research we talk about creating evidence in different ways and looking at the nature of evidence in a very different way and I think stories are where it’s at. Recovery itself is a broad term, it doesn’t just refer to mental illness... it’s a paradigm shift, a way of looking at things. These are things that are intangible things to capture and write about in the peer reviewed literature and to do the standard sort of research that you do. To me a core element in the recovery paradigm that is infusing all of mental health service delivery in Australia as part of the major reform that’s going on is the issue of identity and recovering a sense of self... and stories are so critical to that. So the stories in the evaluation have been the central part for me and it’s the ways we tell stories, what stories get told and how they’re heard, especially by children.”

Vicki Saunders – JCU PhD Candidate – Creative Recovery Evaluation Researcher.

“The overall mood of the group was friendly and lots of laughter. The Bentinck women talked about their island and how they come to Mornington every wet season. How they look forward to going back to their island after the wet. This started an exchange of women’s cultural business. Different land forms from the various islands were talked about. This created a comfortable feeling and a common link between the two groups. Gloria Gavenor, one of the women who has been to a lot of the workshops and who spoke on the ghost-net CD, has an adopted daughter who watches the ghost-net video over and over just to see Gloria on the TV. And she said that I want to be just like my grandmother on TV.”

Sue Ryan – Artist-in-residence, comments in a workshop report from Mornington Island.

“We had the school children with us too and that’s what I like to see, you know - the young people. Culture is very important and learning how to do this (weaving) is part of that culture we can teach them. While we make these beautiful baskets we teach them the weaving and keep the culture going. It’s nice to see ladies come together because sometimes we don’t be with one another, sometimes we are on our own or we weave with our children at home. It’s good to be with the other ladies... there will be a lot of stories being told, I can tell a lot of old stories... I did a lot of things in those days, with the old people... learned to speak their language... and we want to see the language carry on... we want our young people to do this (weaving) too. If we can do it, they can do it too.”

Ellen Roughsy – Bentinck Island weaver and participant in Mornington Island workshops.

“I think it’s very good that we can come along and learn more about weaving. It’s nice to see other women, it’s so nice, lovely. We have a good time together, talked about things and enjoy ourselves.”

Gloria Governor – Bentinck Island weaver.

“I remember what I drew on the wall; it’s about my story way up in the stony country... I drew that story way behind the hills there... there are big tall trees and red ant beds all around... I not allowed to be there, no people, no children... I have to see it from a long way away.”

Janet Koongotema – Aurukun elder commenting on her contribution to the women’s mural.

“You learn culture off your old people, you learn stories, and you learn everything. I’m painting at the old people’s home because we love our elders and we have to look after them. When they come and sit down here they might feel happy to see their stories on the wall. I like that.”

Doomadgee young person.

“It’s important for the kids to get involved - it’s about keeping their stories alive... handed down from the old people, someone’s got to capture all that and keep the story going of all their family heritage... we can do it through the arts.”

M Henry – Artist-in-residence, Doomadgee Mural Project.
4. It’s not just about art

“I can understand that when you look at the program you think it’s just about art, but it’s not... to me it’s about creating opportunity, bringing people together, encouraging the culture to be shared. When you see the people that participate in the program go home at the end of the day and the feeling that they have is apparent. When they leave they are happy, they’ve blossomed. When they feel confident to open up, they will share everything with you... they are just waiting to tell stories and we are giving them an opportunity to tell their stories, they want to, they really do. It doesn’t take long to see the diamond in the rough.”

Kirsty McWilliams – Community Coordinator of Creative Recovery in Lockhart River.

“It’s not just an art project... it’s little more like being closer, closer to families, these people should not be isolated they should be held closer. Art is another way of reflecting what you have inside. Some of these people haven’t got a way of expressing, so they put it down on a painting, we don’t see it as just a drawing or painting on a wall, we see it as someone “inside”- their belief system, what they believe they have inside, what they see in the community, what they value in the community – it’s not just a painting.”

Nancy Stevens – Puuya Centre Coordinator in Lockhart River.

“The project aim was quite simple, it was about bringing together people who may be experiencing a range of problems and be able to share but also be engaged in some sort of meaningful activity as well. Thanks to the dedication of the project team but also to local community members, I think we have been very successful in being able to do that. And one of the flow on benefits has been that people have in fact been able to improve their economic circumstances as well because the artwork has been so beautiful and well received. As a child psychologist working in communities one of the biggest challenges is to try and engage with young people, and while it might be clear to a mental health service what the problems are, it doesn’t mean we are going to be successful in addressing those. So what has come out of doing the mural etc. is the kids are interested and want to be engaged... it’s so important, particularly in preventing future problems.”

Dr Geraldine Dyer – Psychiatrist, Remote Area Mental Health Team Leader.

“The richness of the evidence, for me, what I’ve seen over past three years, is in the stories, it is in the yarning. It’s also in the way that people in the community have recognised the outcomes in people that they felt were quite vulnerable in their community, they’ve seen them out and about, they comment that they seem lighter and happier. So that’s the evidence, the physical evidence of people who were quite isolated to begin with becoming engaged and looking forward to these projects and having that level of change within themselves. That’s the way we’ve been evaluating, we’ve been utilising the stories. It’s not just the art, the fact that they’re doing a visual art workshop it’s a conduit for them to be able to get in touch with their own cultural heritage and their own stories and tell those stories through the art. The actual doing of that in the space with other people is making them feel good.”

Michelle Leenders – Creative Recovery Project Officer based in Cairns.

“It’s not just an art program, it has a lot of other values... a sense of belonging, people are feeling empowered, they are building self confidence within themselves, they are breaking down that stigma, they feel like they are contributing to something and not just dealing with internal stuff... contributing to the whole community as well. It’s good; it’s about bonding with others who share a same sort of passion. It’s something that works and we shouldn’t get rid of it. If it works don’t fix it, if it works it works and there’s no reason not to continue along that line.”

Karen Coca – Senior Health Worker at the Lockhart River Clinic.
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