

From Ashes to Art

*From the ashes of yesterday,
the promise of tomorrow*

Dedicated to the artists and community of the Kinglake Ranges
and the greater arts community throughout Australia.

Michelle Bolmat

Designed by Wilani van Wyk-Smit

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Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House
Toolangi Community House
Flowerdale Community House

The quality of some images relating to the events described in this archive has been degraded over time and unfortunately could not be restored to their original state. The decision to include these images was based upon their historic significance and relevance to the Kinglake Ranges story of recovery.

To see more of KRVPAA post bushfire exhibitions and events please visit the online version of the Digital Archive:

<https://kinglakeranges.com.au/digital-archive>

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of this land and we pay our respects to elders past and present.



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Foreword

Foreword

On Monday, February 9, 2009, I walked into the Regional Arts Victoria office, sat down at my desk and turned the computer on. That was the easy bit. I knew I was supposed to do that. It was figuring out what on earth to do next that was the problem.

What is it that you do in the days after everything changes? What does your future look like when it feels like your past is now insignificant? And more specifically, at least from where I was sitting that Monday: when someone has lost everything, as many had on Black Saturday can the arts offer them anything? Yes, it turns out. Quite a lot, in fact, as this collection attests.

In the years since 2009, we have seen artists of all persuasions contribute to community recovery. The musicians that run fundraisers. The painters that design murals. The sculptors who run community workshops. The blacksmiths who build trees. The mosaic artists that build letterboxes. The jewellers who protect memories. The performers trusted with retelling of stories. The poets who find the words when we cannot. The filmmakers that see what we didn't.

I have learnt so much from watching artists respond to crisis in the last decade-and-a-bit. It has been my incredible good fortune to see the positive impact on mental, physical and spiritual health creative participation can have on a person, a family, or a community, which has made me a passionate advocate of this work. But the responsibility for sharing this knowledge cannot rest with one organisation or individual. It is too easily lost this way. The experiences must be shared. They must be preserved. When they are not, they are forgotten, and when they are forgotten, we cannot learn from them. Against this challenge, a creative archive is a powerful weapon. Bad things will happen again, but so too have they happened before. It is the arts that help us remember this.

In early 2020, following more recent bushfires in Victoria, I called Lindy Allen, who was CEO of Regional Arts Victoria through 2009. I asked how she felt on that same Monday in 2009 when I was sitting at my desk, out front of her office. "My immediate thought," she said, "was what in all my professional life has prepared me for this?" Then she made a phone call. So that's what I did. And then another. And away we went. What on earth to do next? Start by looking to what we have done before.

To the community and artists of the Kinglake Ranges: my sincere congratulations on this important work, as well as the act of documenting and collecting it. I trust others will look to it in future, as I will, so that they might figure out just where to start.

Joe Toohey
Executive Director (CEO)
Regional Arts Victoria

REGIONAL
ARTS
VICTORIA



Preface

Preface

Culture and art can provide ways to share stories, create a sense of belonging, reduce isolation, give voice to experience, make sense of the unimaginable, build empathy and generate creative engagement - all essential tools in the recovery process. When we activate our creativity and, by extension, our civic participation, we enable the growth of hope, a sense of future possibility and the dreaming of a just and welcoming world for all. This digital archive is an important record of the realities of such dreaming. It showcases the power of a community's growth through persistence, vulnerability and imagination.

Severe cascading disaster impacts in 2019/20 have spearheaded a rollout of national enquiries and consequential structural and policy reform that will set the blueprint for Australian emergency management into the future. This moment of growth to accommodate the new reality of disaster management provides an opportunity to develop sustainable pathways grounded in new thinking and innovative approaches.

It is imperative in this time of heightened awareness, that the value of community arts and cultural development philosophy and practice is embedded into this evolving framework of disaster preparedness, response and recovery. For us to support the long-term health and wellbeing of our communities, it is crucial for culture and the arts to claim its space as an essential component. To be planned for and written into disaster management policies across all tiers of government.

Living archives such as these are vital to represent the depth of work and impact that creative leaders can have on the growth and potential of their communities. These records show the potential and power of engaging culture and arts in the increasing impacts of the growing realities of climate change. Communities such as Kinglake are leading the way in terms of creatively addressing the complex, deep and ongoing process of recovery and preparation for a more sustainable future.

Artists and creatives produce and support the culture that makes the world around us. They are critical thinkers, creative problem solvers who critique with authenticity and intention, who feel colour, see sound and help us to find beauty in all things. They are living, breathing representatives reflecting the times and making life memorable.

We commend with gratitude the artists and community leaders who have offered their gifts to our communities and taken the risk under extreme stress to creatively empower the possibilities of today, and whose stories will guide us into the future.

The marking of the time - taken, offered, gathered and shared - reflected through these projects and interviews highlight the healing beauty and strength that comes through creative projects and shared stories.

These stories represent the transformative power of creativity and the deep resilience of the Kinglake community. It is a testament to their commitment to the land, each other and the future of their community. The story is not over, this legacy of sharing, building and dreaming continues.

Scotia Monkivitch
Executive Officer
Creative Recovery Network



Introduction



Introduction

My home in Kinglake West is located in one of several communities which make up the district of the Kinglake Ranges located 56 km north-east of Melbourne at the top of the Great Dividing Range – elevation from 525 to 610 meters. The district also includes the hamlets of Kinglake, Kinglake Central, Flowerdale, Hazeldene and Pheasant Creek, bordering with neighbouring regional centres Castella, Toolangi, Glenburn and Strathewen in the local government shire of Murrindindi. The region also shares a border with the City of Whittlesea.

The early history of the district began when gold was discovered in 1861 on Mount Slide at an area which became known as the 'Mountain Rush'. The Mountain Rush Post Office opened on 7 May 1862, but closed in January 1863 as the miners moved to other regions. The township of Kinglake was established much later in the 1800's with the Kinglake Post Office opening on 14 May 1883. There are two versions of how the town was named. One that it was named after British historian Alexander William Kinglake, whose eight-volume history of the Crimean War had recently been completed. Alternatively, that a surveyor named Alexander Kinglake had passed through the area in 1870 and the town was named after him.

The township of Kinglake comprises forest, farmland and is surrounded by 22,000 hectares of national parkland. Key industries include tourism, farming, retail, nurseries, factories, engineering, light industrial and home-based businesses. Community groups include: Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House, the Kinglake Historical Society, Firefoxes, Kinglake Ranges Arts, The Rotary Club of Kinglake Ranges, Kinglake Men's Shed and Bollygum Park. The community is supported by the local magazine - 'Mountain Monthly' and Kinglake Ranges Radio. There are three primary schools: Kinglake Primary, Middle Kinglake and Kinglake West Primary.

Festivals and events include: The Kinglake Country Fair, Kinglake Art Show, Kinglake Produce & Artisan Market, Spiritual and Wellness Festival, and Foggy Mountain Music Festival. There is an Australian Rules football club, netball club, cricket club, pony club and adult rider's club.

The February 2009 bushfires had a devastating effect on the area with Kinglake one of the main affected towns with 38 people confirmed dead in Kinglake and Kinglake West, and more than 500 homes destroyed.

In Kinglake Central community facilities recorded damaged or destroyed included churches, the pony club and adult rider's facilities at the Kinglake Trust Reserve and the combined sports centre and community facility at Kinglake Central. Primary schools, several community halls, five shops and eight businesses in total were also destroyed. Many home-based businesses were also lost, as were many residences. The parklands and environment around Kinglake were severely damaged, including the Kinglake National Park, a major tourist attraction attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors to the area each year.



Kinglake has a long history of bushfires when extreme weather conditions occur. There were several bushfires at the end of January 2006, into early February 2006, when fires burnt out over 1,500 hectares (3,700 acres). Fires also occurred in the 1982–1983 season, during the 1960s and in 1939. In 1926 major fires in the region caused significant losses; the Post Office being the only building left standing.

The history of a community can be recorded in many ways, in literature, poetry, art and song. When the 2009 bushfires struck, the people of the Kinglake Ranges struggled in the shadow of the aftermath, but amidst the despair and in spite of the ongoing struggle people went above and beyond to help family, friends and their community. People rediscovered their neighbours, helped those in need and became more aware of the problems of social isolation which had been exacerbated during the aftermath.

The artists of the Kinglake Ranges were similarly affected by the fires of Black Saturday – some tragically. Many lost their homes and all their tools. Beloved friends were gone forever and relationships suffered a heavy toll. These artists became a microcosm reflecting the impact of the bushfires on the wider Kinglake community.

An understanding of the community's need to express their sense of loss and grief and record their journey of recovery inspired Kinglake Ranges artists to move beyond their own personal loss and reach out to their community and to fellow bushfire-affected artists. The artists wanted to acknowledge their community's struggle and tell their story of survival through art. They were inspired and in turn wanted to inspire their community. They recognized that the arts can play an important role in disaster recovery and that art in all its forms can be a powerful catalyst in rebuilding strong communities.

Immediately after the 2009 bushfires the arts became a source of positive energy that gave individuals and communities the strength and skills to be reconciled with the past and transform their communities. The legacy of the bushfires is not the tragedy and destruction, but the resilience and courage of the people and the extent to which they were prepared to make great personal sacrifices to help their community recover.

Little is known about the socio-structural changes that take place in communities affected by major disasters, nor of the impact that extreme stress can have on individuals, families and their extended community. The objective of this archive is to provide some understanding of the positive impact an arts led recovery can have on afflicted communities and how participation in the arts can help individuals and community groups survive and recover.

During the process of conducting interviews and researching stories and images for the archive I was overwhelmed by the generosity and willingness of all participants to commit to this project. There have been many challenges, but these were more than offset by the support and encouragement I received from Bronwyn Ward, Grants Officer Kinglake Ranges and Vicky Mann, Coordinator Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House.

To produce a document which contains not only a perfect arrangement of content, but which is also a work of outstanding artistry takes a prodigious talent and in appreciation of her hard work I thank graphic designer Wilani van Wyk-Smit who has captured the essence of the digital archive in a stunningly beautiful creation which will be a source of inspiration for all artists and a valuable resource for future disaster recovery planning and implementation.

Kinglake Ranges artists have not forgotten the heartbreak and loss that resulted from the devastation of Black Saturday, but continue to move forward with courage and determination creating art and community arts projects designed to inspire and support their community.

Michelle Bolmat

Artistic Director

Kinglake Ranges Visual & Performing Arts Alliance (KRVPA)



The Day Australia Cried

Michelle Bolmat

Artwork created using charred and melted bitumen and PVC roadside reflector posts collected from the Healesville-Kinglake Road one week after the bushfires.

Prologue

From Ashes to Art

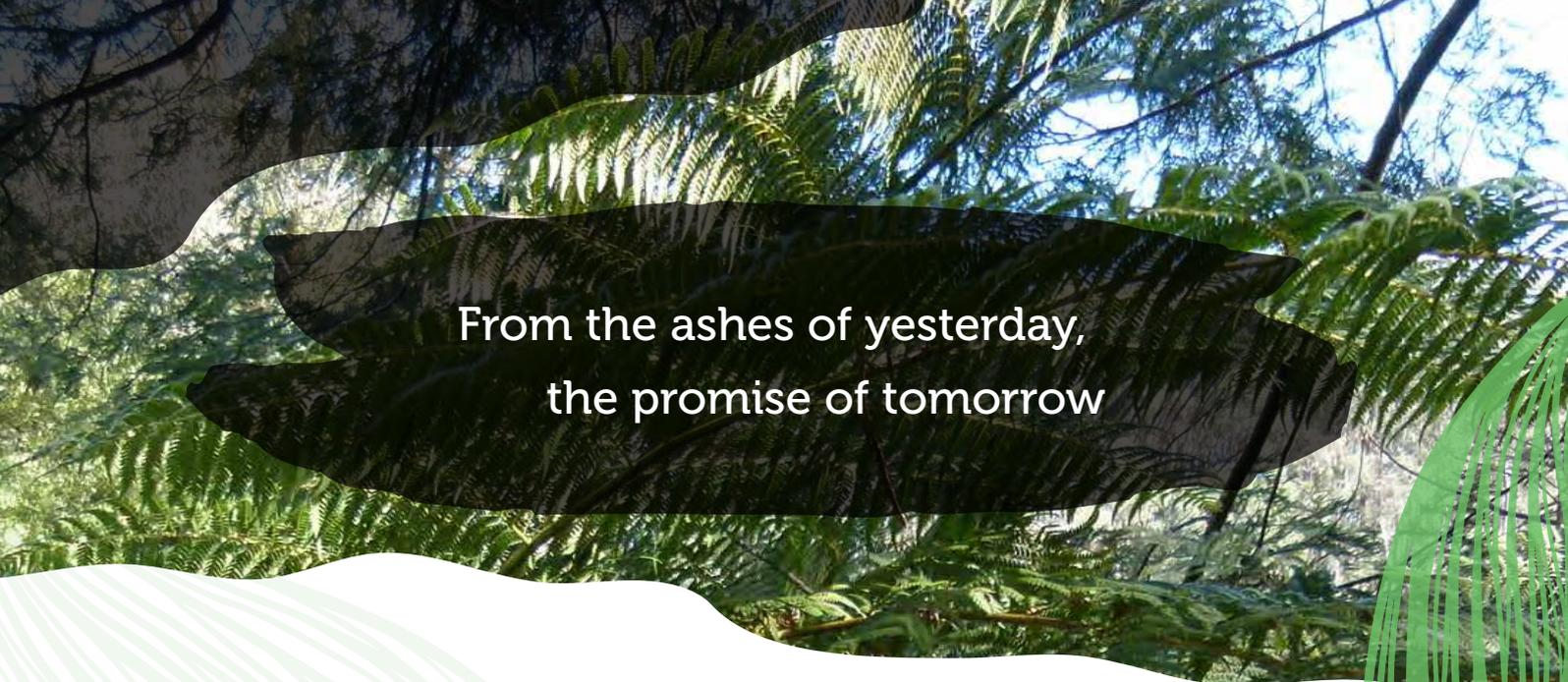
Art in all its forms enriches our world and impacts our lives in a myriad of ways, providing positive experiences and memories which we hold dear to our hearts. Art has always reflected history and given the catastrophic events of February 2009, it has become even more relevant as a tool to aid the recovery process.

From the earliest beginnings, art and culture in the Kinglake Ranges have played a key role in sustaining and promoting our community identity. The arts have been a way of maintaining cultural heritage, connecting different generations and sharing that heritage with others. They have played a crucial role in helping the community celebrate and survive in hard, as well as good times.

In 2008 a group of local artists, musicians, performers and writers came together to create the Kinglake Ranges Visual and Performing Arts Alliance (KRVPA). The organisation was divided into five sub groups: Visual Artists, Writers, Performers, the Kinglake Choir and the Kinglake Radio Station. It represented multiple demographics and a diverse range of cultural and ethnic groups.

From the very beginning KRVPA was committed to the support and promotion of the arts across the Kinglake Ranges and to the establishment and maintenance of cooperative partnerships and friendships with regional, state and national arts and culture organisations. It was a grassroots organization which aimed to unite, encourage and provide opportunities for local artists of all genres and levels. Projects were managed by members of the KRVPA committee and achieved with the help of volunteers drawn from each of the subgroups and from volunteer groups within the community.

KRVPA came to represent a new maturity in the cultural life of the Kinglake Ranges. The Alliance was due to be officially launched on February 13, 2009 but this event was cancelled due to the February 7 bushfires which came to be known as 'Black Saturday'.



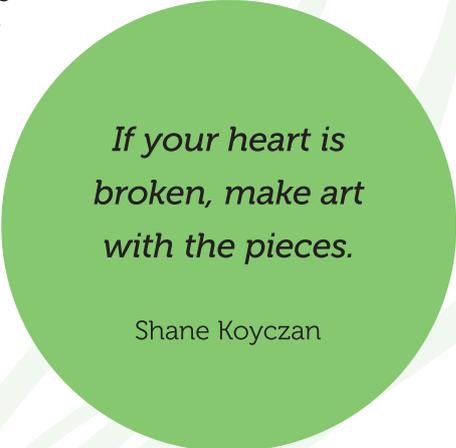
From the ashes of yesterday, the promise of tomorrow

After the fires KRVPA members stepped forward to play a significant role in providing support and encouragement to the artists and communities of the Kinglake Ranges. Multiple events and activities were designed to engage with the people and provide them with a sense of community once again.

Artists were encouraged to express their response to the bushfires and their aftermath through art, music, song and story-telling; to connect with their community, inspire hope for the future and reflect the indomitable spirit of the Kinglake Ranges.

The images and text in this archive will demonstrate the ability of art to reflect not only the rawest emotions of horror, grief and loss, but also to provide an insight into the indomitability and ingenuity of the human spirit. To reveal the courage, determination and resilience that enables a community to move on against all odds; to unite and become stronger, more compassionate and more determined to create a better place for people to rebuild their lives and follow their dreams.

Preserved memories of major historical events are of significant importance and can be a valuable resource that enables communities to recover and move on from catastrophic events. The purpose of this archive is to preserve the personal responses of Kinglake Ranges artists to the bushfires of February 2009 while being an advocate for the value of art in recovery from disaster.



*If your heart is
broken, make art
with the pieces.*

Shane Koyczan

*This archive is about reflection,
inspiration and the journey of recovery.*

List of Events

Arts led events which took place in the Kinglake Ranges immediately after the bushfires and in the years following, culminating in the 2019 Kinglake Ranges ten-year bushfire anniversary exhibition, **Respect & Remember – the Kinglake Ranges Journey.**

2009 Kinglake Ranges Events

Four-day Easter Art and Music event – April 2009
A Better Day Concert – May 2009
The Big Sing – June 2009
Reconnect Kinglake Day – October 2009

Exhibitions and Events 2009 - 2012

KRVPAA 2009 Winter Exhibition 'Renewal', Kinglake - August 2009
Toolangi Festival Art Exhibition - October 2009
Toolangi Festival Art Exhibition - October 2010
Expanding Horizons – The Northern Exposure Event. Northcote - June 2010
Art by the Lake, Eildon - October 2010
Emergence – Art on the Move. Federation Square and the Atrium - February 2011
Emergence – Art on the Move. DHS Lonsdale Street - April 2011
Emergence Whittlesea. Tennis/Cricket Pavilion - April 2011
Artists of the Mountain. Kinglake West - April 2011

Good Friday Royal Children's Hospital Appeal – public art work in Kinglake (artwork auctioned and proceeds donated to RCH), April 2011

Good Friday RCH Appeal – public art work in Kinglake (artwork auctioned and proceeds donated to RCH), April 2012

A Sense of Place – Kinglake West - November 2012 in partnership with the Rotary Club of Kinglake Ranges

Kinglake Heritage Trail – Initiation of a collaboration between KRA, local artists, the Business Network and the Kinglake Historical Society in the design and production of boards for this iconic trail.

Collaborative Art Exhibitions

Yarra Valley Open Studios - Healesville September 2009
Arts Margaret River in Perth, January 2010
World Trade Centre Exhibition - 'Reflection and Regeneration', March 2010
Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission - 2009/2010
Yarra Valley Open Studios - Healesville September 2010
Etihad Stadium – BCF, July 2010
Edgar's Mission 'Compassion Art Day' – April 2011

Projects Completed

KRVPAA worked with the ABC to set up 'Radio Recovery'
Incorporated Kinglake's own Radio Station featuring 'The Unsigned' & 'Kinglake Unplugged'
Open MIC & JAM Sessions x 10
ABC – Kinglake Ranges 'Unplugged' CD
'Friday Nite Live' – Monthly Music
Kinglake Produce & Artisan Markets x 10
KRVPAA Website

2013 - 2019

In 2013 KRVPAA underwent a name change to become Kinglake Ranges Arts (KRA), but continued to support the ongoing process of community recovery and to offer support and encouragement to other disaster-affected communities.

2013 - The 'Connect' Project. This project involved conducting workshops with other like-minded groups and community houses to create gifts for the Dunalley community which had been severely impacted by the Tasmanian bushfires of January 2013. These were subsequently delivered to the Dunalley community house in July 2013.

2014 - KRA conducted 'Street Art' workshops for local youth at the Ellimatta Youth Space and ran a local exhibition to showcase Artists in the Ranges, featuring local glass, timber, and jewellery artists. In February 2014 the 'Blacksmiths Tree' was created as a memorial to the 2009 bushfires. KRA members were involved and KRA sponsored the making of leaves for the tree.

2016 - Launched in 2016, the 'Kinglake Ranges Heritage Trail' runs along the central spine of the Kinglake Ranges beginning at the corner of Whittlesea-Kinglake Road and Whittlesea-Yea Road and ends at Kinglake. The Arts/History Walk features artwork by local artists together with text and photos describing the history of the Kinglake Ranges.

'The Cube' - KRA worked with representatives from St Peters Church to conceptualise, design and co-coordinate a 'puzzle of life' glass cube that mimics a Rubik's Cube and contains pieces from the community that tell the story of their journey over the past ten years. Each piece was laminated into glass cameos to become part of a 3D sculptural piece.

2019 'Respect and Remember - The Kinglake Ranges Journey'. Collaborating with the Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House on the concept and planning, KRA was granted funds to run a community commemorative event marking the ten-year anniversary of the 2009 bushfires: a community inclusive exhibition which allowed old and new community members, volunteers, family and friends and all who were touched by the Black Saturday fires to see and appreciate a unique collection of artworks and treasured items produced in response to the Black Saturday bushfires.

FEATURED PROFILE



Marilyn Gourley

Regional Arts Victoria (RAV)

Background

My current position is Arts, Culture and Event Team Leader in Moira Shire, a Local Government area north of Shepparton on the Murray River. My role is to manage arts and culture development and events. We are currently in the process of establishing four creative hubs in our four major towns to support and nurture cultural development, arts practice, economic stimulus and skills development. The recovery work I did in the 2009 Bushfire affected communities has positioned me to continue my interest in the recovery space and has led me to be one of three deputy Municipal Recovery Managers. My husband and I run a successful horse agistment property and I am the mother of two adult children.



A trained secondary arts teacher, I have taught across all three levels of education, primary, secondary and tertiary. I spent six years at the Shepparton Art Gallery as the educational officer and during this time I completed a Graduate Diploma of Museum Studies and became a qualified curator.

In 2008 I was the Project Officer with South West Arts, a NSW Regional Art board that services nine local government areas. These communities were suffering through the 10-year drought and its associated effects on the rice, agricultural industries and sustainability of small communities. The arts projects and activities we offered became recovery tools, to bring communities together, to give them the opportunity to reconnect, chat, have fun and take some time out from the daily issues they were all facing. In 2009 I was privileged to be able to use all of my skills to support the recovery of the communities impacted by the 2009 Bushfires.

Involvement in community arts recovery post 2009 Bushfires

In the weeks following the February 2009 bushfires Regional Arts Victoria worked closely with staff from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Arts Victoria, Regional Arts Victoria, the Arts Centre, Vic Health, and the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres to coordinate a response. They met with service providers, community leaders, artists and arts organisations that had been affected by the bushfires and it became clear that these communities wanted someone on the ground to work with them to develop an arts-led response. My role as the Arts Recovery Projects Officer came out of that consultation, along with \$100,000 of funding to be rolled out as Arts Recovery Quick Response Grants of up to \$2500 to quickly respond and develop community led projects without the burden of a lot of paperwork.

These grants supported 47 projects across the state. There were 500 artists involved or employed, 3500 participants and an audience of approximately 50,000.

The projects were very diverse. We saw the establishment of choirs such as the Kinglake Phoenix Choir, events such as the Big Sing in Kinglake, felting workshops for children in St Andrews, after school art and performing arts therapy classes both in Nillumbik and Buxton, drumming workshops for men, storytelling through poetry and writing, art exhibitions, the forming of new bands and art groups, the Letter Box Project, the Steel Pan band, the Blacksmith leaf project and the list goes on. Some were one off projects others were the start of something big.

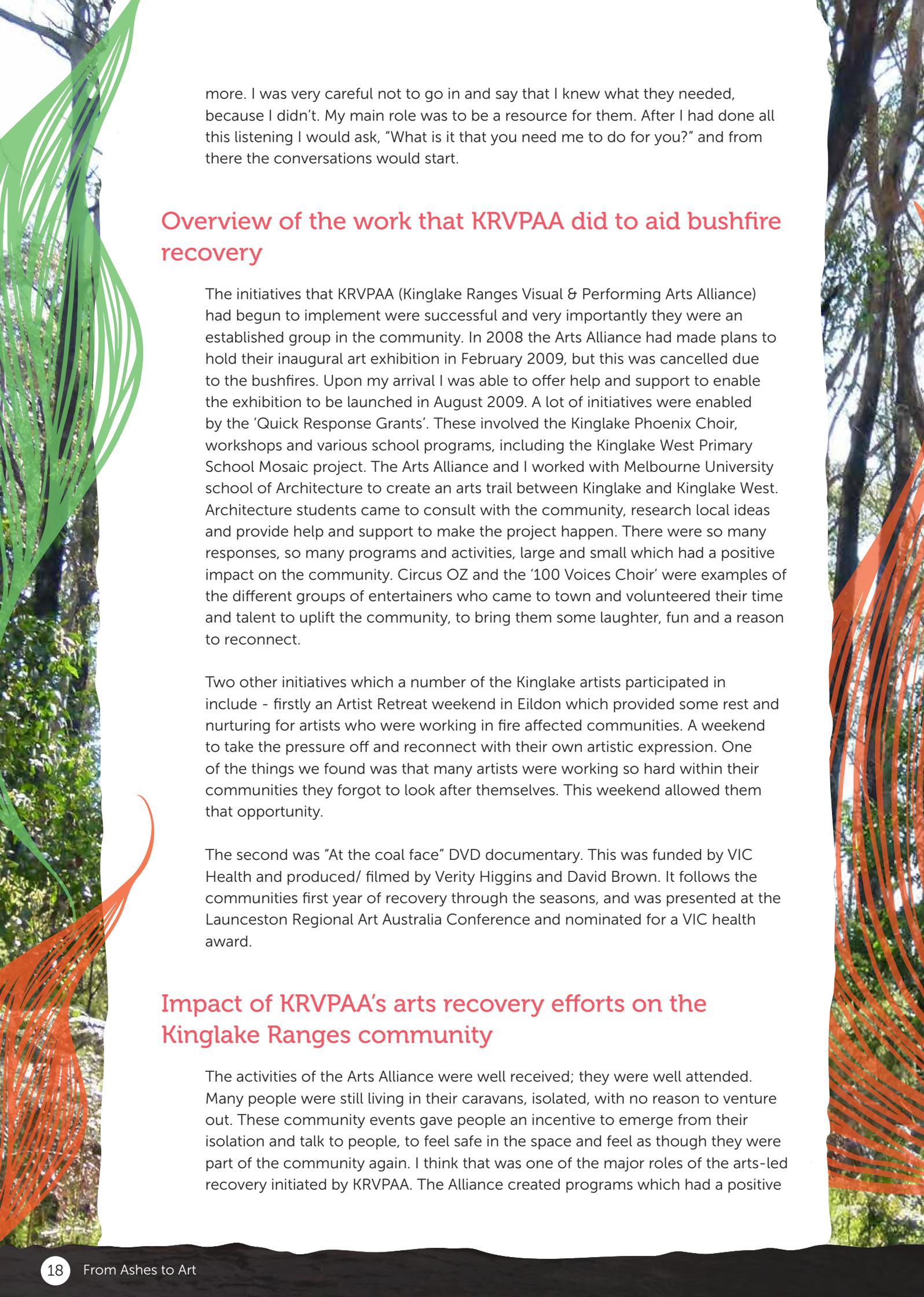
Whatever the form of assistance, whether it be cash handouts or creative community-rebuilding initiatives, there were a number of aspects that I believe were important for their success. These are:

- Speed and simplicity of grants
- On the ground personal support
- Initiatives community driven
- Inclusiveness
- The utilisation of existing networks
- The recognition that people recover at different rates

Bushfire recovery initiatives are most likely to succeed when support on the ground is provided from the beginning. The fire occurred in February and I started in June. The initial clean-up had occurred but many people had either left the area or were living in the temporary villages. It was cold, rainy, dark and miserable. People were still very affected and suffering.

My role encompassed the entire Murrindindi Shire which included the Kinglake Ranges district. I also worked alongside local government arts officers in Nillumbik, Gippsland, Bendigo and other fire-affected areas.

New to the area, I travelled across the shire, attended lots of meetings, held numerous conversations, but the main thing that I found when I began working with these communities was the need to listen. I listened, I listened, and then I listened some



more. I was very careful not to go in and say that I knew what they needed, because I didn't. My main role was to be a resource for them. After I had done all this listening I would ask, "What is it that you need me to do for you?" and from there the conversations would start.

Overview of the work that KRVPA did to aid bushfire recovery

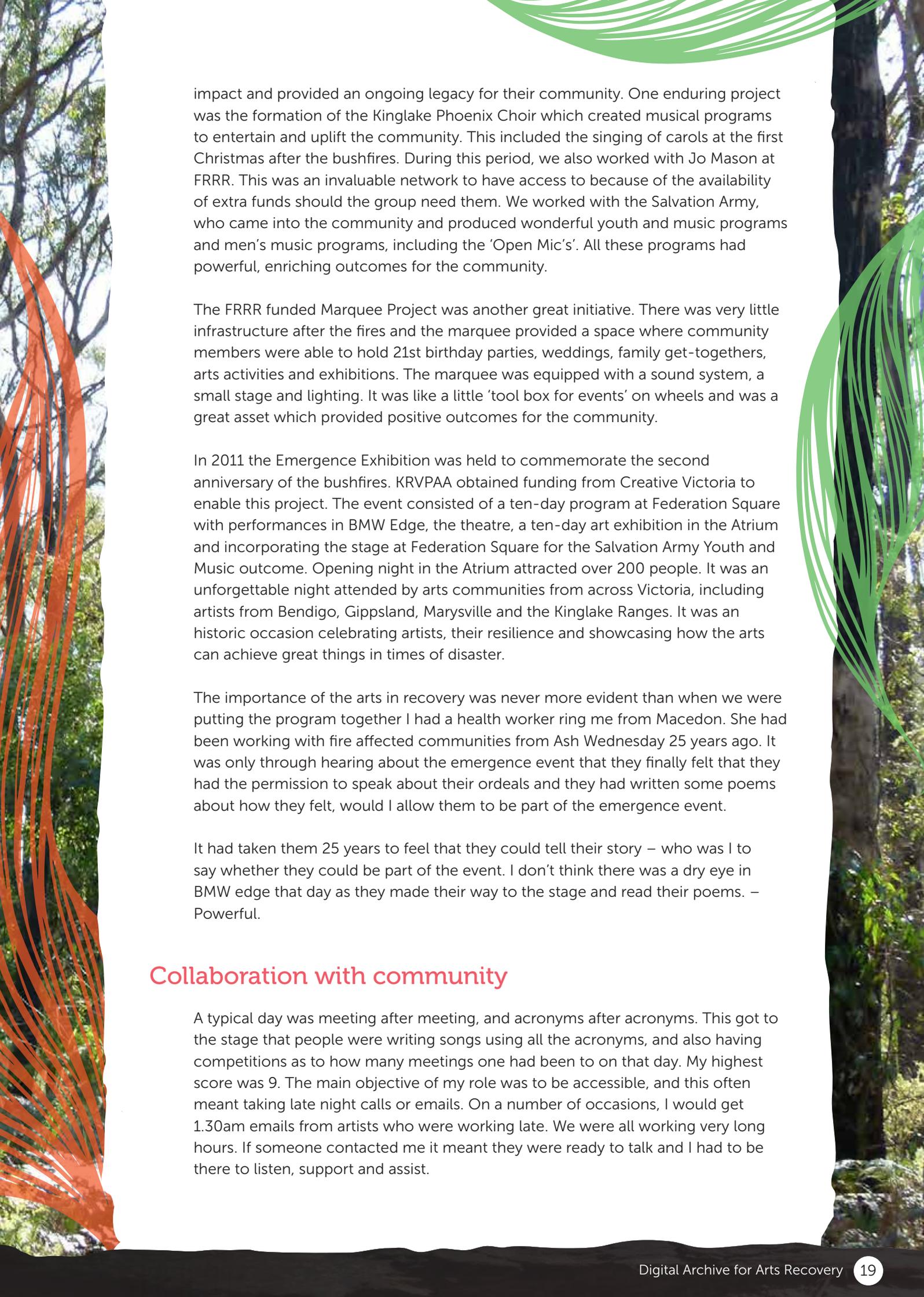
The initiatives that KRVPA (Kinglake Ranges Visual & Performing Arts Alliance) had begun to implement were successful and very importantly they were an established group in the community. In 2008 the Arts Alliance had made plans to hold their inaugural art exhibition in February 2009, but this was cancelled due to the bushfires. Upon my arrival I was able to offer help and support to enable the exhibition to be launched in August 2009. A lot of initiatives were enabled by the 'Quick Response Grants'. These involved the Kinglake Phoenix Choir, workshops and various school programs, including the Kinglake West Primary School Mosaic project. The Arts Alliance and I worked with Melbourne University school of Architecture to create an arts trail between Kinglake and Kinglake West. Architecture students came to consult with the community, research local ideas and provide help and support to make the project happen. There were so many responses, so many programs and activities, large and small which had a positive impact on the community. Circus OZ and the '100 Voices Choir' were examples of the different groups of entertainers who came to town and volunteered their time and talent to uplift the community, to bring them some laughter, fun and a reason to reconnect.

Two other initiatives which a number of the Kinglake artists participated in include - firstly an Artist Retreat weekend in Eildon which provided some rest and nurturing for artists who were working in fire affected communities. A weekend to take the pressure off and reconnect with their own artistic expression. One of the things we found was that many artists were working so hard within their communities they forgot to look after themselves. This weekend allowed them that opportunity.

The second was "At the coal face" DVD documentary. This was funded by VIC Health and produced/ filmed by Verity Higgins and David Brown. It follows the communities first year of recovery through the seasons, and was presented at the Launceston Regional Art Australia Conference and nominated for a VIC health award.

Impact of KRVPA's arts recovery efforts on the Kinglake Ranges community

The activities of the Arts Alliance were well received; they were well attended. Many people were still living in their caravans, isolated, with no reason to venture out. These community events gave people an incentive to emerge from their isolation and talk to people, to feel safe in the space and feel as though they were part of the community again. I think that was one of the major roles of the arts-led recovery initiated by KRVPA. The Alliance created programs which had a positive



impact and provided an ongoing legacy for their community. One enduring project was the formation of the Kinglake Phoenix Choir which created musical programs to entertain and uplift the community. This included the singing of carols at the first Christmas after the bushfires. During this period, we also worked with Jo Mason at FRRR. This was an invaluable network to have access to because of the availability of extra funds should the group need them. We worked with the Salvation Army, who came into the community and produced wonderful youth and music programs and men's music programs, including the 'Open Mic's'. All these programs had powerful, enriching outcomes for the community.

The FRRR funded Marquee Project was another great initiative. There was very little infrastructure after the fires and the marquee provided a space where community members were able to hold 21st birthday parties, weddings, family get-togethers, arts activities and exhibitions. The marquee was equipped with a sound system, a small stage and lighting. It was like a little 'tool box for events' on wheels and was a great asset which provided positive outcomes for the community.

In 2011 the Emergence Exhibition was held to commemorate the second anniversary of the bushfires. KRVPA obtained funding from Creative Victoria to enable this project. The event consisted of a ten-day program at Federation Square with performances in BMW Edge, the theatre, a ten-day art exhibition in the Atrium and incorporating the stage at Federation Square for the Salvation Army Youth and Music outcome. Opening night in the Atrium attracted over 200 people. It was an unforgettable night attended by arts communities from across Victoria, including artists from Bendigo, Gippsland, Marysville and the Kinglake Ranges. It was an historic occasion celebrating artists, their resilience and showcasing how the arts can achieve great things in times of disaster.

The importance of the arts in recovery was never more evident than when we were putting the program together I had a health worker ring me from Macedon. She had been working with fire affected communities from Ash Wednesday 25 years ago. It was only through hearing about the emergence event that they finally felt that they had the permission to speak about their ordeals and they had written some poems about how they felt, would I allow them to be part of the emergence event.

It had taken them 25 years to feel that they could tell their story – who was I to say whether they could be part of the event. I don't think there was a dry eye in BMW edge that day as they made their way to the stage and read their poems. – Powerful.

Collaboration with community

A typical day was meeting after meeting, and acronyms after acronyms. This got to the stage that people were writing songs using all the acronyms, and also having competitions as to how many meetings one had been to on that day. My highest score was 9. The main objective of my role was to be accessible, and this often meant taking late night calls or emails. On a number of occasions, I would get 1.30am emails from artists who were working late. We were all working very long hours. If someone contacted me it meant they were ready to talk and I had to be there to listen, support and assist.



It was my role to source equipment for them, to assist them to restart their practices, to source funding opportunities, find materials, put up exhibitions, events, rebuild their businesses, form new associations, put in good governance structures, facilitate meetings, source networking opportunities, identify artists to work with community groups, manage insurance cover - many artists lost their studios and equipment, had little or no insurance, could not prove a lot of this and could not get their studios etc. replaced. One Kinglake jeweller set her workshop up in a cubby house and just got on with it. They had to be doing their art and being creative as their recovery.

I learnt the value of honest and open collaboration. People who had been through this disaster had lost a lot of trust in government agencies. People had reached the limits of their tolerance with the state government telling them what they could or could not do. Being from Regional Arts Victoria, an independent agency went along way to enable me to build community trust.

Disaster responses must be designed to be inclusive, not to discriminate, and to encourage participation by all. They should not be contingent on age, gender, background or ability to participate.

All communities recover at different rates, as do individuals who are part of those communities. The design of any bushfire recovery initiative needs to acknowledge this and not impose an inflexible time frame on communities to be ready for support or help at a particular time.

It was my role to work closely with individuals in affected communities to identify at what stage each community and individuals were at and then allow people enough time to recover, to allow people to recover at their own rate and to use whatever forms of support suits them. This was probably one of the most difficult aspects and one had to just go with the flow. It was also something which I think we all could have done better.

One of the key learnings is that whatever you do, it's got to be community-driven, community-owned and community-delivered. That's the bottom line. If you go in and tell people, "This is what you've got to do", the recovery response will fail. It's interesting because, after the recent bushfires of last summer, I'm not sure that the authorities have actually listened to the learnings of the past.

Approach to an arts-led recovery

It is crucial to involve communities in all aspects of decision making. This will help determine the nature of the support required; whether it is quick response grants for creative projects, or funding to go towards building new community connections for long-term outcomes. My role was to help projects and initiatives remain community-driven.

Bushfire recovery initiatives are more likely to succeed if linkages and networks already in place between community workers, emergency services workers, human services workers (such as Red Cross and Salvation Army), council workers and community service groups are strengthened or supplemented using the disaster recovery funding. The earlier these networks can be identified and strengthened, the better.

It was very important to not duplicate services or events to talk and to support each other for the best outcome. I know everybody was working 150% so if we could work together it made a lot more sense.

The crucial things that make disaster recovery successful

The arts performed an important role in rebuilding bushfire-affected communities in Victoria, and similar to other more tangible infrastructure projects. The arts were seen to be a powerful medium that allowed people to express what was inexpressible in words. They created a 'caring community' by increasing people's self-confidence, contributing to the forming of new communities, bringing order to people's lives, creating living memorials to the bushfires and allowing people to give to others.

The most important aspect of community recovery.

It must be community led. The role of the arts in disaster recovery is to provide the means by which people can reflect and commemorate how their community has changed and how it may be redefined. To help people within communities reconnect and break down barriers of social isolation, encouraging people to share their stories and capture important moments in history for generations to come. The arts can help people express their feelings of loss, grief and hope, giving people a sense of normality when things around them seem out of control. The Arts Alliance achieved those things through programs and activities that they created and built upon.

These lessons need to be listened to, learned and preserved. From my connections with different communities, I have found that the most important thing is building trust, through listening, being accessible and supporting when asked.

FEATURED PROFILE



Brad Quilliam

Founder & President of KRVPA

Background

I had been involved in the graphic arts as part of my printing business well before 2009. As a resident I wanted to utilise my skills to support the community. My experience working with the Kinglake Ranges began with the district community news magazine, Mountain Monthly in helping them to develop the magazine from black and white to a colour publication.

I was involved in the establishment of a performers' organisation in 2002/2003 working with communities in the development and provision of opportunities for performers. As Vice Coordinator of a national artists' network (Australian Artists Network) I became involved with local and national organisations, as well as developing initiatives by working with a number of secondary schools and government bodies in running community events in the Diamond Valley area based on engaging community through performance events with a positive message and informative content such as wellness, health and social themes, e.g. mental health, diabetes, cancer.

In 2007 I worked with local businesses to re-establish the Business and Tourism Association (Kinglake Ranges Business Network) in the Kinglake Ranges. As a complimentary project I was approached by local businesses in 2008 with the idea of establishing an arts group in the Kinglake Ranges.

Involvement in community arts recovery post 2009 Bushfires

Immediately after the 2009 fires I saw the KRVPA (Arts Alliance) as one of the bigger drivers in supporting the morale of the community and an opportunity for artists to tell the story through different mediums. I realized that a lot of people would be able to tell those stories through painting, writing, performing and through live music.

KRVPA looked at the possibility of an arts-led recovery plan following the bushfires.

The group organised a presentation to representatives from several organisations and government agencies at the Harvest Café in Kinglake. As a result, KRVPAA was offered support and resources to take the next step in developing a plan to help build morale within the community. This plan was so well accepted that many other government bodies and community groups applied it to other areas as well.

Incorporating my involvement with the Murrindindi Mitchell Tourism Recovery group, I obtained funding for KRVPAA from Tourism Victoria to encourage people back into the area through the running of events. During the initial bushfire response KRVPAA organised approximately 20 events in the first 12 months after the bushfires.

Because of my various roles in the community I realised the challenges for local businesses. The business & tourism sector advocates would need to have a united and collaborated approach, so I was involved in setting up 'Murrindindi Incorporated' for all business and tourism associations across the shire to work together and provide benefits for the local economies, as well as assist with local business recovery. Through my involvement with local youth, I obtained funding and support from Rotary International to build the Ellimatta Youth Centre, a youth-focused presence which provided ongoing recovery support for the youth of the district.

Realising the ongoing challenges for the community and witnessing how the experienced members of the Kinglake Ranges were being ignored I gathered together several members of the community and we established the Rotary Club of Kinglake Ranges. The Kinglake Rotary Club has been instrumental and involved in many community recovery and support programs and later went on to form a partnership with KRVPAA in support of the arts in Kinglake.

KRVPAA applied for funding from FRRR and secured funds for equipment, including a large marquee, plus a range of other items such as sound equipment to be made available for the community to run events to uplift the Kinglake community's morale. KRVPAA (Arts Alliance) was then able to showcase the talents of many local performers, artists and musicians.

KRVPAA also worked with the Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House to set up a local radio station with the support of the ABC Radio Corporation and the Victorian government. Many residents were interviewed and this provided immediate information which was relevant to the community's recovery, plus people were able to tell their stories. This instant communication initiative saw widespread radio networks established in various other bushfire-impacted communities. Mountain Monthly worked with the Arts Alliance and published many stories from locals describing their experiences in their magazine.



'Emergence – Art on the Move', Federation Square, Melbourne 4 – 13 February 2011

The Emergence event was a huge initiative driven by KRVPAA with the assistance of Regional Arts Victoria's Arts Recovery Project Officer, Marilyn Gourley. It involved different arts groups and arts programs across the state and included visual artworks, musical performances and short story and poetry readings by emerging and professional artists from all 2009 bushfire affected communities throughout Victoria. It also included artists who were affected by the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires. All works dealt with themes from the Black Saturday bushfires and the truth of the recovery process.

A lot of programs to help with men's health were established across the state. KRVPAA developed a song writing program for men who subsequently performed their songs at the Emergence event.

The arts group worked with the Kinglake Historical Society to set up an 'Arts History Walk'. This involved both the business network and other community groups working together on a community project designed to bring the Kinglake Ranges people together.

Collaboration with community

I found there was a lot of confusion going on in some areas which was quite difficult, particularly when people were pursuing their own agendas and selfish ambitions. They were not in it for their community. People who were being divisive made it very difficult for the community. Most people disengaged because of the way that these people behaved. I had some history with the Ash Wednesday fires, and having being part of that community, I had learnt that you just needed to be persistent and you would prevail. I worked harder towards the importance of strengthening unity within the community by having teams manage projects. The encouragement of collaboration amongst various community groups and sectors was paramount.

Dealing with government-based institutions

Community members all had the same ideas in that we wanted to rebuild, wanted to help our community recover. A lot of people didn't quite understand, particularly people in government who had pressures placed on them as far as time constraints. I knew it was going to take a lot longer than the timescale these people were proposing. Governments work to a different time agenda than communities. A timeframe for a government is usually based on their tenure of approximately three years, so they will work on a three or four years' timeframe. As a community we knew that things would take a lot longer. It was very difficult for people from Melbourne to come to heavily impacted regional communities like Kinglake and try to be a part of our community without really understanding that, in some cases, people were still traumatised and felt that this was invasive, so these traumatised individuals were pushing back at times. Due to the extreme recovery effort and the impact on many lives some of these government personnel were adversely impacted by some of these individual reactions. It was quite traumatic for some

government officials. In contrast, our KRVPA members tried to be honest with them; we were not demanding of them. We worked with them respectfully and I think that we achieved a good outcome for the lack of resources that we had initially. I think that what we achieved had a lot to do with the support we received and the great response to assist our endeavours from the government.

Community response to KRVPA activities

The community and the KRVPA arts group worked in teams focusing on their artistic passion or art genre. I thought that we had to do this together - a community which is united is strong while a community which is divided will fall. I felt that a lot of people were divisive and that if this were to continue it would divide our community. Working in teams united us. We had various groups, such as the arts group, various community groups, youth groups, business and tourism, historical and Rotary. To demonstrate the mature way of rebuilding our community and to avoid individual burnout we made it a priority to deliver projects in teams. I think that was to our advantage.

Other challenges

I think that the challenge, particularly with government bodies, was that officials did not utilise past learnings and experiences from previous disaster events well enough in which the pattern of behaviour and recovery was very familiar and extremely frustrating. It demonstrated the immaturity of our leaders and bureaucrats.



I think the other problem was the restrictions around donated money. We had a lot of problems in obtaining funding; the money could not go towards commercial activities. It couldn't go to the churches, schools, sporting clubs, so we had a lot of problems in the way the money was donated to the Red Cross for distribution to aid recovery in disaster areas. The Red Cross is an organisation that

has been around for many years. The laws around donated funds are out of date and not suitable for the support of present-day community recovery from disaster events. This situation needs to be addressed urgently to avoid the suffering of many communities who are impacted when government directs funds to inappropriate funding recipients.





Another major problem was that there were a lot of loud voices who produced a lot of confusion. The government thought that the loud voices were the ones to silence, or the ones to listen to. But loud voices are not always the wisest voices. Sometimes you will find that it is the quieter voices which are the wiser ones to listen to. Unfortunately, a lot of government representatives were a little bit shell-shocked when they came into the community. They were hearing all this confusion and were trying to calm the situation and the loud voices, but each time they tried something it only stirred some people further. In contrast, KRVPAA quietly worked on projects and then presented them to the community as a celebration and people were uplifted and participated. We had a much more mature and sensitive approach to things. The challenges were ongoing because people were still wanting to be heard, but in some cases people were ruled by self-ambition. We had to try and empathize, we applied patience in understanding that people were still hurting and needed a voice. Instead of getting involved in arguments we gave the community a chance to be heard – that was the challenge.

Impact of KRVPAA's activities on the morale of the local community.

When people have had a huge negative experience there needs to be an equally positive experience to try and balance that out. I think that we were creating a number of positive experiences, so that hopefully, these would offset the negative experiences; to try and encourage hope again because a lot of people had given up hope and that was going to be an ongoing battle for bushfire recovery in our community. We were saying "Look, you can get up and celebrate people's efforts and be entertained and have some colour back in your life." With activities such as the arts events bringing this colour back into people's lives, all of a sudden a lot of people stopped and went, "Hmmm, yeah". We were trying to offer a number of positive experiences and we succeeded beyond our expectations.

The value of music and performance in an arts-led recovery

We realized that in embracing an arts-led recovery that it was important that there were regular opportunities for artistic self-expression and release of emotional trauma through music and song as well as 2D visual expression. In some cases, it was a lot easier getting someone to participate in live performances rather than confining their self-expression to producing art. We organised big performance events such as the 'Big Sing', a musical extravaganza intended to provide support for bushfire-affected residents. It involved several visiting choirs including The Chocolate Lilies, The Sparkles, Sing Australia, the Whittlesea Choir and introduced the newly-formed Kinglake Phoenix Choir. In addition, there was the 'Better Day Concert' - an all-day concert in the main marquee. We had the Melbourne Gospel Choir, which produced a lot of positive, uplifting songs by different performers – Deborah Conway, Taxi Ride, plus local performers who engaged the community in a whole range of themes. The 2009 Kinglake 'Reconnect' community event in October 2009 attracted more than 3000 visitors who had been invited to come to Kinglake and see for themselves the

resilience and strength of our community. Musicians, singers, performers and artists worked together to produce an event aimed at uplifting the community and recognizing our emergency volunteers.

In total we put on over 20 events in the first year and then in 2011 we produced 'Emergence', a major event which acknowledged the traumatic impact of the 2009 bushfires on our artists and community and celebrated their recovery through the arts.

Over the last 11 years, everything has had its challenges, everything has run its course.



The most important thing in disaster management

The most important thing I can advise is, don't lose your integrity. I found that a lot of people wrecked their relationships because they gave up their integrity which was something that I guarded because I felt that a lot of people were driven emotionally to behave in a certain way. I feel that we were blessed with the people that we had, particularly the ones who were the doers. I felt that we had a really great team. I think that it is important that if you are going to do anything, make sure that you have a good team and work with that team and with your community. You've got to make sure that you don't divide the community. You work with the community and you work at bringing the community together, rather than dividing it.

It is the people that need to rebuild the people.

So it's the community which needs to rebuild itself by working together and that is the thing that I held onto and still do.

I found that divisiveness happens in all different situations. It doesn't come down to having a lot of money, it doesn't come down to having the smartest community, or the community with the most infrastructure, it comes back down to the people, and the people's attitude towards each other.

That was the way to rebuild our community and that was what I found to be the most important thing - more than anything else. And that is what I encourage in others as well, because governments are good at building ghost towns. They will come in and they will build infrastructure and things like that, but they don't always know how to rebuild the people (the community).

It is the people who need to rebuild the people. It is the community which needs to rebuild itself by working together and that is the thing that I held onto during our time of crisis and I still do.

FEATURED PROFILE



Michelle Bolmat

Artistic Director KRVPA
Visual Artist

Community

As a long-serving member of the Kinglake Ranges community I have been honoured to fill a variety of roles.

- Editor Mountain Monthly.
- Member of the MM executive committee.
- Deputy Team Leader, Community Liaison Officer and Team Leader for the Kinglake Community Emergency Response Team (CERT).
- Member of the Community Emergency Response Committee (CERC)
- Founding Member of the Kinglake Ranges Visual & Performing Arts Alliance (KRVPA).
- Artistic Director KRVPA.
- Kinglake Ranges Arts (KRA) Committee.
- Kinglake Ranges Artist - Visual Arts/Painting.
- Exhibiting member of the Victorian Artists Society, Plenty Valley Arts and Kinglake Ranges Arts.



My involvement with the arts in Kinglake began in 2008 when I joined a group of local artists, musicians, performers and writers who had come together to create a new vision for the arts in the Kinglake Ranges. Their logo described the fledgling organisation's core values: unite, create, sustain and grow. The Kinglake Ranges Visual and Performing Arts Alliance (KRVPA) was committed to the support and promotion of the arts across the Kinglake Ranges. The official launch was scheduled for Friday 13 February 2009, but this event was soon overshadowed by the catastrophic events of February 7, now referred to as Black Saturday.

Involvement in community arts recovery post 2009 Bushfires

The bushfires had a massive effect on KRVPAA's activities when the social fabric of the Kinglake community almost disintegrated. Immediately after the fires, the community was in a state of shock. People didn't communicate very well. They felt isolated. They were not outgoing. They didn't form into cohesive groups. There were a lot of people desperately trying to make sure that their families were taken care of. People became very protective; they didn't know what to do, where to go, how to respond. Kinglake became a community of lost souls.

KRVPAA artists were all personally impacted by the bushfires, but in spite of this were driven to reach out and help their community. The following story provides an account of the positive impact that participation in activities involving the arts can have on traumatised individuals and communities.

In the weeks that followed the bushfires, a small group of KRVPAA artists saw the giant marquee which had been erected by the army and thought they would hold an impromptu exhibition to bring a little relief to the community.

Temporary fencing was used as make-shift display stands while the artists made use of nearby picnic tables to provide art demonstrations throughout the day. Young people were invited to join the artists in making art, "Come and paint, come and splash around, come and join us", they offered, but the response was poor. Small children clung silently to their mothers as they walked around and looked at the artworks. Coloured pencils, crayons and paper were offered, but the children stood quietly, eyes cast to the ground with only occasional, furtive glances at the artists.

Then one little boy approached the table and tentatively reached out for crayons and paper. Slowly and silently he began to gently guide the crayon across the paper in soft, swirling arcs. After a short time, his strokes became bolder and more animated with orange, red and gold slashes of intense colour. His mother watched in amazement, her eyes filling with tears as she explained that she had not been able to get her son to talk about the fires, or his feelings about the aftermath, but now she could see the turmoil raging within the strokes of paint. She remained at her son's side, gently caressing his shoulders as he became lost in this world of dreams where he was able to express his feelings in a safe, protected place. Slowly but surely other children began to join the table and soon they too became lost in their own private world of fantasy and imaginings.

Eventually the small boy and his mother left; he holding the paintings protectively to his chest, his mother gently guiding him down the gravel path as they disappeared into the crowd. Watching them slowly walk away the artists realised that children who had been





unable to vocalise their troubling, overwhelming emotions had found relief in the creation of art and that this sense of release from grief and horror might be transferable to the rest of their stricken community. To offer some respite from the burden of overwhelming and conflicting emotions, even if only temporary, would be a truly worthwhile goal.

KRVPAA musicians and performers came to the same conclusion, discovering that music and performance had much the same effect, with crowds of people moving as one towards the source whenever music was in the air. And so KRVPAA artists, musicians, performers and writers came together in a spirit of friendly cooperation to provide comfort to their community through events and exhibitions designed to uplift and unite.

Overview of the work that KRVPAA did to aid recovery

In the weeks that followed the bushfires, KRVPAA secured support to develop an arts-led recovery plan to help build morale within the community. It was largely due to this ongoing support that KRVPAA was able to organise approximately 20 events in the first 12 months after the bushfires, followed by a multitude of events and projects over the next several years.

Impact of KRVPAA activities

When KRVPAA began its initiative to boost community morale they created events involving music, performance, song and art. Crowds would be drawn to the music; they would go to where the art was. The community responded to these events and began to talk and laugh, and a new level of communication grew out of their response. KRVPAA's message of hope became widespread throughout the community. It evolved to affect not only local organisations, social groups, schools and business leaders, but all Kinglake residents. It positively influenced other communities and brought visitors to the ranges. It enabled people to express their feelings in a non-threatening environment. The catch-cry, "Come and join us and have fun!" was irresistible.

Flow-on effects of arts activities

These activities helped the Kinglake community to recover. They opened up the Kinglake Ranges to other communities. They brought people from neighbouring regional centres and the metropolitan area to the ranges to see what the artists were doing, to see how the community was coping. They connected a lot of organisations that came Kinglake to undertake community work and allowed the community to react to rapidly evolving situations in a calm, receptive way. Many of the people who came here to assist, in some way or other, became involved with doing things for the community through art, music or song and this broke down a lot of barriers.

Collaboration with community

The process of collaboration, when it was done in an open and honest manner, went very well. It grew confidence in the system. However, many people came here with good intentions, but without having had first-hand experience of how the community felt, it was very easy to go one step too far. Whereas when activities involved musicians, performers and artists it was very hard not to have an open and honest, positive response. A formerly difficult situation would become completely non-threatening. This was in sharp contrast to the highly-structured organisations which came to Kinglake to do a job that had to be done, but sometimes there was a little bit of 'over-stepping the mark' from the community's point of view.



Collaborations with other institutions and service providers

There were some very positive collaborations. The army erected a huge marquee and created an area where they could feed the community and provide an area for people to unwind. Humanitarian groups, community service charities, animal aid groups and more came here to help and were met with goodwill from the community. Organisations such as St Johns Ambulance, Global Care and the Red Cross, they were appreciated and welcomed.

Regional Arts Victoria appointed Marilyn Gourley as an Arts Recovery Projects Officer to quickly respond and develop community led projects without the burden of a lot of paperwork. Marilyn arrived in June 2009 and immediately set out to help the artists and in turn, the Kinglake Ranges community in their recovery efforts. Marilyn was soon followed by RAV Arts Recovery Projects Officer, Jo Herbig, who added an ongoing level of support for the arts community. Other support organisations included the Victorian Bushfire Recovery Authority, FRRR, Shire of Murrindindi, the Department of Human Services and other government agencies. Even the local magazine, Mountain Monthly, became heavily involved in supporting the local community and promoting community health and well-being.

Challenges within the community recovery process

It was mainly government organisations that initially presented the biggest problem. The very structured, purposeful approach of government bodies seemed a little invasive and lacking any understanding of community feelings and needs. It was often felt that some of the official paperwork was way over the top and unnecessary. Eventually a lot of this bureaucratic form-filling was waived which was much appreciated. Unhelpful administrative procedures usually only involved government organisations. Organisations such as the Red Cross, Global Care, Salvation Army, St Johns Ambulance, Metropolitan Ambulance, SES, CFA and the RSPCA - they were seen as welcome supporters.



An arts-based approach to recovery

An arts-based approach to recovery provides the opportunity to reflect the feelings and needs of the community, negate feelings of isolation and provide appropriate avenues for recovery. A lot of things come to a full-stop in times of crisis. Life seems to come to a standstill and when there are shops closing, industry shutting down, schools empty; if you drive through your township and it appears lifeless, it doesn't do anything for your emotional wellbeing, for your mental health, your ability to recover and move on. However, if you drive through and suddenly there is a new piece of stunning community artwork that is uplifting, it gives you a sense of being able to overcome the present situation.

This is especially the case if another creation is seen when you drive through again, and you think, "Well, all is not lost. We can survive this. We can move on. Our community is not dead."



The most important aspects of community recovery

I think communication is number one. If you communicate, you promote understanding and a spirit of cooperation. Appropriate communication takes away feelings of being unsure and lacking confidence in the system. If there is honest and open communication and you are actively listening to the community, if you are giving them the means to communicate with you and if that communication is evident in what you do in the future, the community will form a bond of trust and faith with you.

It must be community-led, enabling people to retain a sense of control. To encourage a spirit of inclusiveness and break down the barriers of social isolation. To provide the means to safely express troubling emotions amidst tragedy and devastation. To provide support in overcoming fear and uncertainty and renew confidence in the future.





The arts in the Kinglake Ranges occupy a very unique place in the region's response to the Black Saturday bushfires. My objective, as a member of the Kinglake Ranges arts community, is to help ensure that this history is not lost. That it remains preserved for people to revisit and for future communities to understand how the arts can serve them, not only when disaster strikes, but also when their community is thriving.

Participation in the arts can fulfil a vast number of needs. When disaster strikes, the arts can empower you. When difficulties arise the arts can provide a sense of release.

When you are feeling happy, the arts can make you even happier. When you're feeling ambitious, it can provide the means to excel. When you want to rejoice in just being alive, the arts are a means of celebrating life itself.

*To encourage a spirit of inclusiveness and break down the barriers of social isolation.
To provide the means to safely express troubling emotions amidst tragedy and devastation.*

FEATURED ARTIST



Karen Osterried

Manager Kinglake Phoenix Choir /
Entertainer / Artist

Community

I have a business in the Kinglake Ranges. I develop life and business skills using horses in equine-assisted learning. This includes all the human centred skills required in leadership, teamwork, resilience and well-being. I work with people with learning disabilities or anxiety issue, as well as small, medium and large organizations for leadership, teamwork, change management and well-being.

I am an active member of several committees within the community. I am also on the Pandemic Recovery Committee for the Murrindindi Shire Council.

Background

I have a background in medical science and the fitness industry. I was a professional entertainer and managed these complimentary careers together, as they balance each other. Participation in the arts has been and always will be a very big part of my life.

I became involved in the Kinglake Ranges Visual & Performing Arts Alliance (KRVPA) after moving to the district in 1995. The arts community had been talking for a long time about having a facility that would encompass all of the arts and do justice to the colourful mix of amateur and professional artists within the area.

Involvement in community arts recovery post 2009 Bushfires

The week after the fires struck I had been due to start a choir in Kinglake. I knew the therapeutic benefits of singing as a group and was determined that a choir could be an option for the community to have an outlet to unwind, learn something pleasant and make beautiful sounds together. That was my goal immediately after the fires. I was able to enlist a brilliant local pianist Matthew Stott, the use of the old Uniting Church in Kinglake West for rehearsals and in June, we ran The Big Sing in the marquee, with 130 choristers, from five choirs which was covered by SBS. The choir was very nervous, but afterwards they were beaming with pride to be a part of the beautiful sounds echoing on the mountain. It changed a lot of perceptions of what a choir is all about.

Overview of the work that KRVPAA did to aid bushfire recovery

The activities of KRVPAA were phenomenal. I think that the Alliance truly rallied the community, even though a lot of us were heavily impacted by the fires in some way, shape or form, including losing properties, houses, artworks and equipment, as well being physically damaged and losing people that we knew.

KRVPAA appeared to be more flexible than other groups in as much as people in the arts are very creative, their minds tend to be able to think of new ideas and solve problems by doing things differently. The impact of the activities of the arts group was hugely therapeutic. The community was able to participate in multi-dimensional art programs and people who would not generally think of joining in such activities were having a go. This changed a lot of perceptions. At several of the events that I ran involving the choir, people came and said, "Wow, I didn't think a choir could be that much fun", or "I didn't think choirs did that kind of thing". Additionally, there were a lot of comments such as, "You know, I didn't think I could sing, but I really enjoyed this." It was inspiring to provide people with the opportunity to participate in activities which were positive and brought colour back into their lives. The entire region was grey, white or black; there wasn't a lot of colour. These community events brought a sense of vibrancy back, they gave people a window to future possibilities which in turn gave them a lot of hope. It built a lot of individual self pride, as well as community pride. It was a hugely powerful tool in the recovery of individuals and the community.





Impact of KRVPAAs arts recovery efforts on the Kinglake community

The activities of the arts group had an enormous impact; the fact that all the sub-groups of KRVPAAs joined forces to work together so beautifully. The performing artists and the musicians were always involved with the visual artists' activities and vice versa. The other thing that connected the Kinglake Ranges arts community is that they received a lot of support from Regional Arts Victoria which provided an Arts Recovery Project Officer in the person of Marilyn Gourley.

Challenges within the community recovery process

Challenges within the community involved the problem of distance, topography and administrative support. Most services and supports were located off the mountain and in opposite directions and involved a lot of travelling. In addition, even though there was a lot of support from Regional Arts Victoria, coordination of donations and the related aspects of distribution were creating problems. Logistics involved in the allocation and distribution of donated instruments and other equipment to people who lost these in the bushfires were very difficult. One of the major challenges I had was the government's limitation of administrative support. We needed an efficient administrator to work with someone with sufficient knowledge of the community to administer the allocation of donations. That would have been a huge, huge bonus, although requested it was not offered at the time.

I was a member of six different committees at the time and it was just exhausting. I didn't have a house, I didn't have a property and I had to rebuild and repair, take down fences, organize quotes, etc. I think that having the government say, "Okay, we'll give you the expertise of an administrator to come in and help you sort out donations." That would have been a big help. That was one of the challenges: the people who had the knowledge were not given any administrative assistance to do what was needed.

Important aspects of the arts-led recovery from the 2009 bushfires

I'm quite amazed at what the Kinglake Ranges arts community managed to do after the fires and the level of success that they achieved given the seemingly insurmountable difficulties which had to be overcome.

KRVPAAs was extremely fortunate to have a lot of very professional and skilled artists who also had good business minds to establish control and get some structure into things. Also, if you do not have coherence within a committee you will not get things done. I think our biggest advantage was the fact that we had members on the committee from all areas of the arts and we worked extremely well together. One major problem I see with future disaster recovery projects is the problem of different groups doing the same thing, instead of combining their talents/power to achieve an even bigger impact on their community.



I definitely think that an arts-led recovery is a beautiful way to come out of a disaster. My only concern is that because people were so busy, for whatever reason, there were still people who fell through the cracks. I did not attend many of the arts events because I was busy setting up other bushfire recovery events, or had to work restoring my property. But my attitude has not changed, arts involvement is absolutely critical for recovery. The self-confidence and the pride that is generated from creating a work of art cannot ever be underestimated.

After the bushfires the Alliance organised music/jam nights encouraging people to get out and have fun. We provided a place for people who wanted to have a go at learning an instrument, or to try singing. This had a threefold benefit to the participants; they learned something that was fun to do, they got to stretch themselves in an enjoyable and safe environment, and their participation enabled the growth of a sense of self-confidence and achievement. These jam sessions are just one example of the projects that I would say enable an arts/entertainment-based approach to community recovery to be successful.

I remember the people who made mosaic letter boxes, the people who created jewellery and the silver-clay work, as well as the artists with their acrylics and pastels and the singing. They all blended so beautifully. I think the arts has to be a critical part of recovery. Involvement in the arts gives people a break from the monotony and the drudgery of the recovery process. They can benefit from it; they can have a beautiful letterbox, or they can put a piece of artwork on their wall. It's like, "Oh, that will be something to celebrate the new building," or "I'll have a new letter box and I'll tell people to look for this letterbox and they will know where to come, or I go to sing at Federation Square."

***It gives you a sense of identity,
it's your creation.***

FEATURED ARTIST



Marlyse Carroll

Silk Painter / Wellness Retreat

Background

My name is Marlyse Carroll and I have been involved in various art practices for most of my life. I moved to the Kinglake Ranges with my husband Michael in 2004 and became involved in the local arts community which led to new friendships and opportunities. At that stage Michael and I were running the 'Inner Peace Institute for Wellbeing', a non-sectarian organisation based in Melbourne. There we taught life skills relating to stress-management, meditation, health and wellbeing.

Involvement in community post 2009 bushfires

After the 2009 bushfires ravaged our community, we felt luckier than most and decided to give back by helping less fortunate survivors. To that effect we organised a four-day residential retreat called 'The Next Step'. Our intention was to help participants integrate their past experiences of loss and grief, energetically release the traumas still held in their body, and for each person to create a sustainable vision for their future.

From day one, as soon as we started organising the retreat, we were blown away by the kindness and generosity we encountered. The owners of a residential centre we used regularly with other groups offered their premises free of charge. Our greengrocer gave us the produce needed to feed 30 people for four days. And a couple of professional facilitators and therapists joined us pro-bono.

'The Next Step' took place in August 2009. Whilst it was not art-focused in a traditional sense, art did play a huge role in the process.

Let me count the ways...

The art of talking and listening from the heart without judging, blaming or interrupting others. The art of breathing consciously in order to let go of pain and limitations. The art of moving, walking, eating, singing and dancing with little or no inhibitions. And finally the art of creating a vision board also known as a treasure map.

And what do new psychological tools give us? Choices. What does freedom give us? Strength. What does a map give us? Direction.

So a treasure map is a visual representation of what we choose to be, do or have. It's a creative reminder of what we want to attract in our life and how we want to live in the future.

On their last night, all 'Next Step' participants spent a few hours cutting out inspiring pictures and words out of various magazines. They then glued those on a large board, drew whatever was missing and created their very own collage artwork. A bright, colourful, creative visual representation of their happy place.

Now a treasure map is not the sort of art that one would enter in an exhibition or display in a prominent place. It's more like a secret garden that one can enter at any stage. It offers its creator glimpses of an inner landscape that makes their heart sing.

Most people laminate their board and hang it in their bedroom. Seeing it daily for years to come is a powerful reminder of what matters to them. Which is helpful in decision-making and, one step at a time, moving towards their envisioned future.

So all I can say is that an art-based recovery can take many shapes and forms.

Given the right circumstances, even people who believe that they don't have any artistic talent whatsoever can excel at doing something creative and feel proud of their achievement.

Whatever the medium, the flow-on effects of artistic pursuits are both powerful and long-lasting. And whether creativity is experienced individually, or by a group of like-minded people, everyone benefits, including those who consider themselves hopeless in this area.



Important aspects of an arts-led recovery from traumatic events such as the 2009 bushfires

Here are some of the benefits of embracing an art practice:

1. Healing.

Most people find artistic pursuits not only relaxing but also therapeutic. As we express our feelings in creative ways, we open new windows through which we let go of past trauma and breathe in peace.

2. Increased resilience.

Every time we face artistic challenges and push through limitations, we expand our ability to deal with life's frustrations and obstacles. Good practice for expanding self-worth and self-confidence.

3. Personal growth.

Art making allows us to experiment and express our uniqueness in safe ways. The more we create, the more authentic we become. As we give ourselves permission to shine, we feel good about ourselves and become kinder to others too.

4. Connectedness.

All art forms tend to bridge mind, heart and soul. We feel more connected to who we truly are, which is joyful and spiritual in essence. And when we practice art in a group setting, we're likely to connect deeply to others, breaking down barriers of social isolation.

All of the above is good for individual mental health and essential for any community facing the aftermath of a natural disaster.





Now as the saying goes, the proof is in the pudding.

'The Next Step' retreat was just one piece of the puzzle in the large context of an art-based recovery in the Kinglake Ranges. And whilst bushfire survivors faced many challenges in their healing journey, I believe it would have been even harder for all involved if it wasn't for the active support of a strong arts community.

FEATURED ARTIST



Catherine Blakey

Kinglake Ranges Artist

Community

My community is relevant to where I moved after losing everything in the Black Saturday fires. I have become an arts advisory resource for some groups.

I have been involved with the Whittlesea arts community since 2010 and also with the Nillumbik arts community since 2010.

Whittlesea:

Paid and volunteer community art practitioner
Artist leading community events
Paid mural painter for community venues
Workshop leader and mentor
Train the Trainer leader
Anniversary Event art practitioner
Exhibition participant
Council Art Acquisition Committee community member

Nillumbik:

Paid and volunteer Community artist
Fire recovery art practitioner /leading classes
Workshop teacher National Diversity in Disaster conference
Community event Artist
Studio practitioner and teacher
Exhibition participant

Background

I have been an art teacher for 56 years in the areas of Primary, Secondary, Post-Secondary, University, studio, and community. I retired four times, but am still teaching. I ran my own Arts Manufacturing business for 24 years in Adelaide and Malaysia. I was awarded the Australian Design Award in 1987 and have been exhibiting in all Australian states since 1980.

Involvement with the arts in the Kinglake Ranges post 2009 bushfires

I left the Kinglake community in 2010, but still retained a connection with the Kinglake Ranges community. After the fires I was involved with the Lindy de Wijn kindergarten project, multiple community exhibitions, as well as workshops and counselling at the Kinglake Ranges Neighborhood House. As a professional artist and judge for the KRA/Rotary art shows in Kinglake I was able to remain a part of the artistic community. Exhibitor numbers remained high and organisers always produced a worthwhile artistic event. The art show continues to keep the Kinglake Ranges connected and involved.

Another post bushfire activity which helped me get through the trauma of the bushfires was my involvement in the 'Into the Light' festival which kept me connected to other people who had gone through the bushfires, or were supporting. I wasn't dependent on this, but it provided me with other people I could turn to who knew the feeling and understood the situation.

I had been through worse. I had been through the same thing in South Australia with bushfires and had also lost a son. So I had been through a lot worse. The trauma I suffered as a result of the 2009 bushfires was pretty severe, but before I left South Australia I completed a graduate degree in grief and loss counselling, so I knew what to expect. I had an idea of how to handle the situation. I wasn't thrown off course too much because I had a direction to follow and I had my husband Graeme, to care for because he was diagnosed as being terminally ill in 2011.





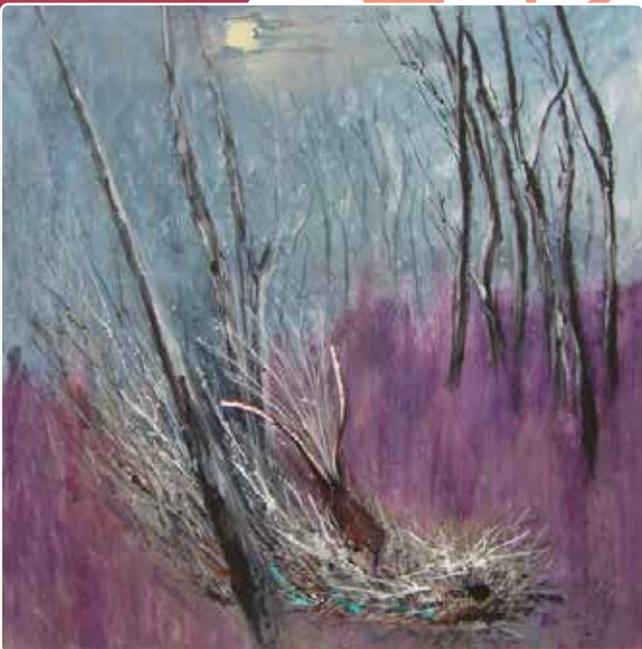
I managed to cope, but one thing which enabled me to keep going was when we were living in the Kinglake temporary village and we built a four-bay farm shed on the property so that I had a studio. It was my studio which kept me going. It wasn't the community, but the studio which enabled me to keep on being creative, to express feelings and ideas. A lot of my friends said, "Oh you're still painting the fires!"

The process of recreating the bushfires in paint went on for a while, but that was understandable because the event was still having a huge impact on my mind. Painting was the way I expressed my feelings, even when for the first six months after the bushfires I didn't have any of my own art materials. It was part of my psyche to be artistic and creative; I had to draw and paint. A creative ability is something that is very precious because it enables me to manage and cope.

KRVPAA activities

Following the 2009 Bushfires, Kinglake Ranges artists began exhibiting in a wide variety of venues around Kinglake, in surrounding townships, the city of Melbourne and interstate. Art was accepted and valued as a great therapeutic tool.

These activities provided many people in the community with a goal or direction, as involvement in the activities of the arts group enabled connections with community and other artists and contributed to the recovery process.



My husband Graeme Blakey had been singer and performer for 60 years. In 2008, as part of his presidency of KRCA, Graeme was actively trying to establish a local choir group. After the 2009 bushfires in Kinglake, Graeme and Karen Osterried established the Kinglake Phoenix Singers, a group of people from Kinglake, Toolangi and Whittlesea who met weekly in the Kinglake West Church Hall to enjoy the therapeutic values of singing. With help from the Bushfire Recovery funds and community groups, the choir acquired an electronic keyboard, amplification equipment and sheet music. Performances were held in various local and Melbourne venues, often in conjunction with other choirs and performing groups. When the choir was disbanded in 2014, largely because many of the choristers moved from the Kinglake Ranges, the equipment went to local primary schools to continue the therapeutic value of singing together.

Impact of the bushfires on the Kinglake Ranges community

I think that the community itself eventually ended up being fractured and dismembered and quite difficult and I think that led to a lot of community art activities being pushed to the sideline. Many artists in the community had left and this made a big difference. The number of people needed to keep the art group going had been reduced to a minimum. People were not able to take on roles within the group because they were unable to give their time, or their concentration, or their focus on the arts because they were busy trying to focus on getting themselves going again. After that sort of trauma, a lot of people change direction, they change track and they don't necessarily stay involved with the arts because a lot of other things come up, building houses, managing difficult families, different associations, etc. A lot of people moved away and the community of Kinglake became a bit dysfunctional; a consequence of the severity of the trauma they went through. I'm only saying this from an outsider's point of view, as I only remained in Kinglake for two years after the bushfires.

Challenges encountered within the community recovery process

- A lack of focus, understandably, from traumatised people unable to move forward.
- Recovery directions dispersed into areas that at times were not essential.
- Trauma recall being a challenge for some involved people to participate.
- More encouragement than normal needed for people to be involved in arts activities, as they were less able to be self-motivated.

Key things that enable an arts-based approach to community recovery to be successful

- Empathy.
- Understanding of experiences.
- Acceptance of difficulties and other ideas.
- Understanding of different approaches to coping.

FEATURED ARTIST



Michelle Stewart

Former President KRA and
jewellery artist

Background

I returned to study in 2010 to do an Advanced Diploma in Jewellery at NMIT and went on to complete my Bachelor of Fine Arts at RMIT University, Melbourne with First Class Honours in 2017. Throughout this time, I took part in many exhibitions both in Australia and internationally. In 2018, I was selected for Craft Victoria's 'Fresh!' awards and was presented with the 'Frankie Magazine Prize'. My work was selected for the National Contemporary Jewellery Award in Griffith. I held a solo show, sent my recycled glass installation to the 'Arte Laguna Prize' in Venice, Italy and won the sustainability award. I travelled to Canada for a Botanical Research and Arts Residency and began a year-long Artist in Residency post at the Glasgow School of Art in Scotland.

With a strong emphasis on thoughtful approaches to making and considered material choices, I am working towards a minimal impact with my practice. The materials that I use in my work are carefully chosen to pose questions about humanity and to invite the viewer to look closely and handle the work. I make jewellery and small scale sculptural work that has a focus on environmental issues.

I started with KRVPA as an ordinary member then became Visual Arts Spokesperson 2010 -2012 and President in 2013. I was also the Artisans Market Representative on the committee. I conducted jewellery beading classes at KRNH and silver classes at Ellimatta. I especially enjoyed mentoring nervous artists. I also assisted KRVPA with working groups and with the setting up of exhibitions and shows etc.

Impact on the community by the work/activities of KRVPAA post 2009 bushfires

KRVPAA activities brought people together and gave people something enjoyable to do; to get out of their houses, to meet up with people and not be looking at burnt trees. All these had positive impacts on the spirit of community togetherness. Even many years later people were finding connections through KRVPAA art classes. People were reflecting back, but the classes were also providing an outlet for people to create artwork which reflected their image of the future. The classes gave people something to focus on and somewhere to direct their creativity energy.

Challenges encountered within the community recovery process

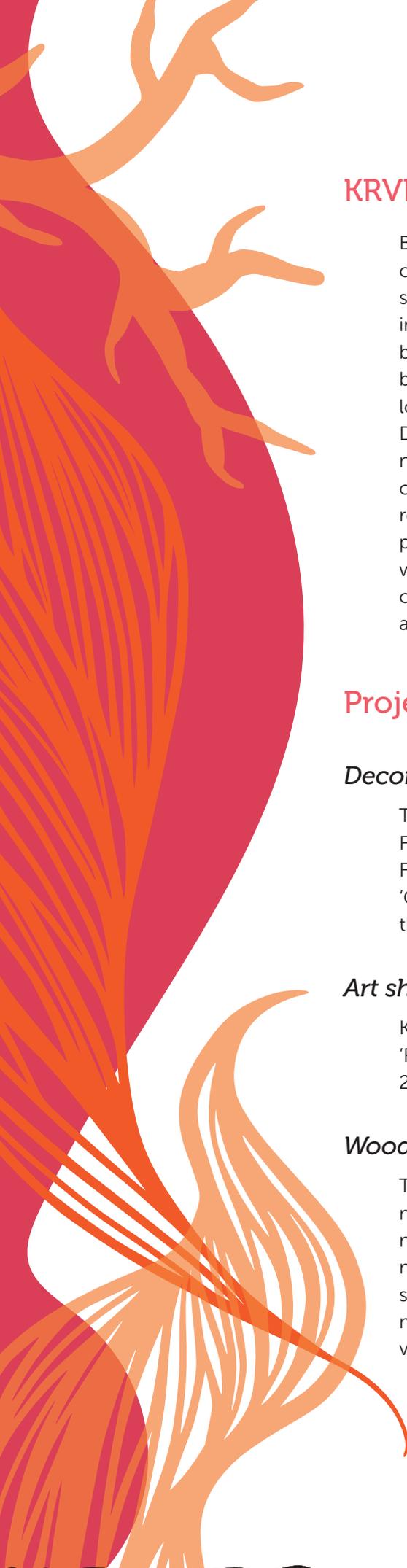
Some groups were hesitant to work with each other due to past grievances. High stress levels were having an effect in some cases and it was difficult to deal with that. I had to sit down and discuss these issues openly and sometimes at length before any progress could be made.

I think having conversations with people was the important thing. Through conversations and saying, "Yes, I understand, but let's change this. We're all here for the community and so let's all work together." On the flip side there were also those who had an optimistic outlook and they were great to work with due to past experiences which had a positive outcome. Also, the school groups were very keen and wanted to get in amongst everything – the children were really positive.

Ongoing collaborations

Regional Arts Victoria (RAV) and FRRR. Jo Herbig from Regional Arts Victoria was very active in a supporting role.





KRVPAA's approach to community recovery

By the time I took on the lead role, KRVPAA had been active in the community for a few years. However, the atmosphere was a bit more settled and we had begun to look outwards and more to the future, instead of looking back to the bushfires. Obviously the fires remained a big part of our history and we could not extract that from the present because it was part of the history of the community, but our focus was looking outwards because we had been quite a closed community. The Dunalley Project changed the group a little because we said, "We're not the only ones, so let's go out into other communities and bring these communities in." The Kinglake community was ready for that. The need remained for arts-based activities to be part of the ongoing recovery process and the people attending classes were a testament to that. We were looking towards future collaborations and sustainable management of the group; looking to connect with other communities near and far and the Dunalley Project was part of that.

Projects and Art Shows

Decorate your Bike Project

The 'Decorate your Bike Project' in 2013 was held as part of the Good Friday Appeal event. We had prizes generously donated from Kinglake Foodworks and categories such as 'Best Bike', 'Fanciest Bike' and a 'Group Challenge' with participants from the local primary school and the Junior Fire Brigade.

Art show held at Middle Kinglake Primary

Kinglake Ranges Arts and Rotary Club of Kinglake Ranges Art Show – 'Ranges of Colour'. Held in the Middle Kinglake Primary School, October 26 & 27, 2013.

Wood and Glass shows at the Mechanics Hall, Kinglake West

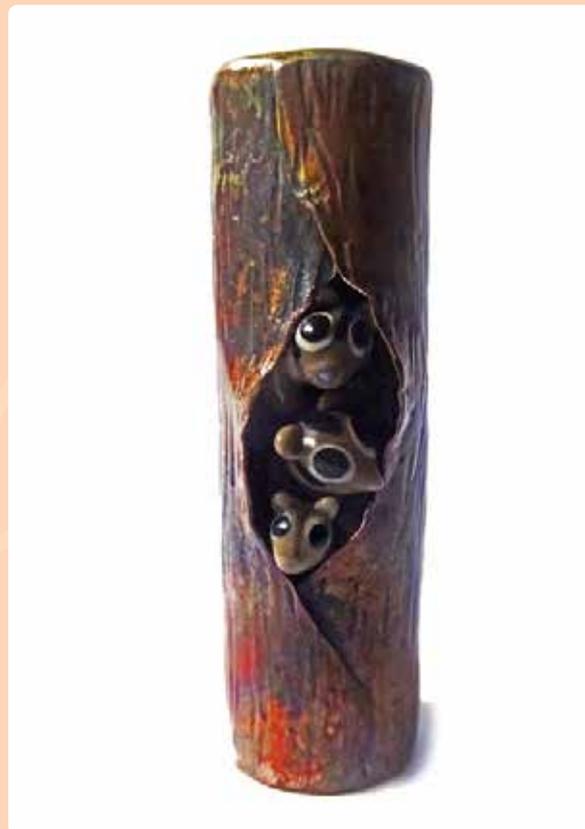
These were small focussed shows to highlight specific skills in different materials. They were held to showcase a range of work using the same materials. At both the woodworking show and the glass show we had many contributors with a range of different outcomes with essentially the same material resources. We also had demonstrations at the shows and most of the artists were available for the weekend to engage with the visitors.

Key things that enable a successful arts-based approach to recovery

To provide a source of comfort and a safe setting, particularly with classes, but also with shows and other events. People bonded at events and in classes because they knew that the other participants understood where they were coming from. Also, the creative process can be meditative, as it slows down the mind and body while consuming all troubling thought processes. Classes gave people a purpose to make things, giving them important creative time. This enabled people to step away from worries and other distractions while they were creating. Some people would come to classes and not want to join in, so I would let them sit and watch and gradually entice them to make something. They always would and then at the end of the class they would be so grateful for the interaction and the creative space away from their troubling thoughts. The classes had a big impact, even three years later. They were very positive for a lot of people even though things had slowed down a little since the fires.

Unsuccessful approaches to arts-based recoveries

Having too many people coming in from outside the community. External people coming in with a lack of empathy, or a real understanding of the situation. Outsiders came into the community because they wanted to help, but quite often they were perceived as the problem. Perhaps input from outside the district would be best if it was organised as a specific support role for those already in the community. There were also the challenges that we faced where facilitators burned out after a while.



Most important aspects of community recovery

Funding - not for the sake of getting money, but for people to take part in classes. One of the important feedbacks I received from the classes was that some participants could not have joined the class if it wasn't subsidised/free. Subsidised tuition allowed people to come along to classes when normally they may not have had any incentive to pay for a class when they had no confidence that they would get something out of it. However, because it was free they figured that they had nothing to lose. This hurdle of uncertainty regarding fee payment balanced against the probability of personal benefit, was removed. These people came to the class because it was free. They didn't want to be a part of it, but in the end they would always participate – they would be drawn in. At the close of the lesson they would say, "That's amazing! I didn't think that I could make anything that good."

I believe that connecting through creating is an important healing tool and even more so during times of hardship and trauma. Facilitation and the creation of opportunities for this is paramount during the recovery process. I have seen this as an instructor leading classes, but have also experienced it as a participant.





FEATURED ARTIST



Gay Chatfield

Artist / Sculptor

Community

At present, my community is very environmentally conscious and has a desire to protect native areas as much as possible. A group of women I am a part of under the auspice of 'The Great Tree Project' gather fortnightly to create eco-dyed pieces on recycled woollen blankets, which are sewn together in panels to form the trunk of an 80-metre-high trunk of an old growth eucalypt. This is to highlight what is being logged in local coups and is to be used at activist events to bring to the attention of the public to what is occurring and how it is affecting the habitat of many animals, as well as the land itself.

Additional art projects I create, or are involved with are community-based and use natural materials. A beautiful combination of workshops to teach skills I have acquired, as well as commissioned projects requiring my woven structures, such as kindergartens and council playgrounds.

Involvement in community arts recovery post 2009 bushfires

Prior to the 2009 bushfires my involvement with KRVPA was brief, as I was still teaching and doing disability work. At the end of 2008 I had decided to give up my teaching and put time into my own arts practice. With the event of Black Saturday resulting in the loss my home and possessions in the fires, I was catapulted into a completely different direction than I originally thought. I was temporarily displaced from Kinglake, but decided to collect and use remnants of my belongings to create some quirky artwork. Through KRVPA I discovered opportunities to exhibit. This was a new experience for me. During this evolving time, not only did it open up a new way of looking at my art sculpturally, but it provided more opportunities to connect with other artists and provided ways to see art as a healing tool, both for myself and for the greater community.

Impact of KRVPAAs arts recovery efforts on the community

The impact that KRVPAAs had on the community post bushfires was that it provided an important network for artists, especially in informing artists of opportunities to exhibit and take part in projects that were either local or working with other fire-affected communities, as well as opportunities for funding/grants. The Alliance also created events involving the local community which were always well attended and enjoyed by all.



Such events were the 2009 Winter Exhibition 'Renewal' which was the first memorable event held locally that brought many of us together in our first expression of the effect of the bushfires. For me it was a reconnection with community members, finding out how they were getting on and the topic of the exhibition reflected the nature of new growth in not only the outer world, but also people's inner resilience; the will to create positive from the negative. From this event came the Toolangi Festival Art Exhibition, Expanding Horizons - Northcote, Art by the Lake - Eildon, and Emergence, 'Art on the Move' - Federation Square in Melbourne which reached a broader audience and connected with other fire affected areas.

Collaboration with community

It was an amazing time of richness and growth for myself as an artist. To experience great collaborative processes, connect with other artists, both in and outside my community and build a great network which led to many other opportunities. At the same time, I always received positive feedback from community members who participated. There was always an awareness of being sensitive to those affected by the trauma and an element of support was usually at hand for any individuals who needed it.



The atmosphere was generally one of nurture and care. It was also evident that people were very touched by the artworks and events and it was also an opportunity for them to connect with one another. Bringing community together in a beautiful, inspiring way helped with healing. All perspectives were expressed and included.

Collaboration with recovery-based institutions

I think that KRVPA certainly needed to collaborate with recovery-based institutions such as RAV, FRRR, and local councils for funding, grants, personal aid and support, as they would not have had the means to do any of the arts activities without such help. All my experiences with these collaborations were positive.



Involvement in arts-based community recovery

I continue to be involved in bringing creative projects to the Whittlesea Community Garden which was created post 2009 bushfires, as well as various other bushfire anniversary events. I am now creating community weaving projects aimed at health and wellbeing for recovering trauma-affected people.

My approach has only changed in the fact that I now have more confidence and a greater range of skills to offer to my community.

I think the most important aspect of an arts-led community recovery is support from such groups as KRVPA, Regional Arts Victoria and local Community Houses/Centres under the auspices of local councils. And finally, provision of inspirational projects that are all inclusive.



Important aspects of an arts-led recovery from traumatic events such as the 2009 bushfires

The most important elements to an arts-led recovery from catastrophic events, besides monetary support, are:

Inspiration: Artists bringing their ideas and passions to share with the community.

Collaboration: Utilizing and valuing others, their contributions and working together.

Nurture: Allowing ideas to expand and grow into other areas and showing care and value to all those who participate.

FEATURED PROFILE



Jo Herbig

Regional Arts Victoria (RAV)

Background

I currently live in Maroondah, Heathmont more specifically. It's a bushy area with lots of café's and creatives are drawn to living in this quiet, peaceful community. I am a member of my Council's Arts Advisory Committee, so my role in my local community is strategic and supportive. I advocate for art to be part of major upgrade projects and for artists living within the community to have as many opportunities as they can via Council support, funding, promotion and networks.

I also work for a local government organisation in an arts capacity, managing exhibitions, public art projects and programs, art collections, participatory art projects, and increasingly more strategic work across Council, advocating for and managing art in public space as part of major project delivery.

Being able to bring the right people together to realise a creative idea is so satisfying. For more than a decade I have built bespoke creative project teams to deliver exhibitions, arts programs, creative infrastructure and public art projects, providing sector related strategic leadership and support for artists and the wider arts sector, while also managing art collections, various creative initiatives and advising on art space facility requirements. Collaboration and consultation have been essential to the success of every project. From my own industry connections, I have enjoyed linking artists, professional arts organisations, facilities, institutions and funding bodies from around Australia. By nurturing these relationships, I have seen growth in networks and creative outcomes.

I enjoy creating an environment where I can encourage others to flourish, according to their expertise and creativity, while also ensuring they are safe, motivated to seek new opportunities and trusting enough to openly discuss fresh ideas and perspectives. I appreciate the importance of sharing knowledge and really enjoy mentoring others.



My own practice is unpredictable, spontaneous and usually inspired by curiosity, awe or an under explored or represented experience or emotion. It may come in the form of writing, singing, dancing, drawing, photography, design or a new idea. It usually takes me by surprise but once started has a life of its own.

Involvement in community arts recovery post 2009 Bushfires

In 2012, I was employed by Regional Arts Victoria as the Arts Recovery Officer for the Murrindindi area, including Kinglake. Marilyn Gourley preceded me for three years in this role, instigating amongst other things, the well-known 'Emergence' exhibition. My role was to facilitate the RAV grants program, support and mentor artists and art groups, facilitate local arts development and creative networking, build community capacity to engage in and with the arts, and advise on public art and memorials.

Overview of the work that KRVPA did to aid bushfire recovery

When I started working with KRVPA in 2012 the group were at a point where they wanted to take a step back from organising activities and events and plan for the future, from a strategic perspective. Previously, they had been involved in a range of exhibitions, festivals and events in the Kinglake community as well as actively collaborating with government representatives on designing a community/ arts facility and an art and history walk. However, as a group made up entirely of volunteers, they were becoming tired and feeling the traumatic cumulative effects of the bushfire.

Impact of KRVPA's arts recovery efforts on the Kinglake Ranges community

It seems in the first three years their effect on the Kinglake community was very positive and impactful. Despite losing so much as individuals they were out there wanting to make a difference and help people rebuild their community through creative expression. They were proactive in their approach, not reactive, constantly finding ways to interact with the community. During the time I worked with the group, their focus was inward, they needed to find a way to make their work sustainable into the future.

Flow-on effects of these activities

It's difficult to say for the period I was ARPO. The mood was somewhat different by the time I arrived. Everyone was exhausted or moving on. I think the temporary/ ephemeral activities they participated in or initiated had a positive effect on the local community at the time but creating a lasting legacy was difficult. Working with many diverse stakeholders to create permanent public art and purpose-built facilities takes great determination, persistence, collaboration and compromise, a considerable expectation of people recovering from trauma.

Collaboration with community

At the time, many in the group were great collaborators and wanted to find a way to make the group's activities sustainable into the future. We are all individuals who come with different life experiences, and some were more resistant to accepting help and change than others. Unfortunately, many obstructions were encountered as a result. I contracted a facilitator from KPMG to discuss the importance of strategic planning with the group, outlining the process involved. I was then able to run several strategic planning sessions resulting in a strategic plan that could be implemented over the next four years.

Challenges within the community recovery process

Probably the key challenge was being an outsider. I did not live in the area and therefore was not part of the community. In the relatively short time I was in the role it was difficult to establish deep roots in widespread communities across Murrindindi, from Flowerdale to Alexandra, Marysville to Buxton. I had to work extra hard to meet with as many groups as I could, attend events, exhibitions and promote my skills and availability via socials, newsletters and extensive in-person networking. The results were positive though, within six months I was able to build several creative databases and reach an extensive audience with a fortnightly local arts newsletter and Facebook page as well as establish the 'Made in Murrindindi' craft network.

The crucial things that make disaster recovery successful

According to the Creative Recovery network; 'a growing body of evidence indicates that, particularly in times of community distress, the arts can provide great benefits to personal and community wellbeing, such as increased community cohesiveness, confidence and resilience, improved physical and mental health, reduced feelings of isolation, new personal and creative skills, strengthened connections to place, and a sense of shared optimism'.

(<https://creativerecovery.net.au/resources/>)

This was certainly my experience. Art and craft made an enormous difference to people's lives in the years following the bushfires. It brought people together, it enabled them to connect, celebrate, debrief, share memories and hopes and plans for the future. Activities needed to be accessible so as many people as possible could engage and participate. While I was ARPO, craft and music were the most popular ways of bringing people together. It wasn't unusual for a woman to jump off her tractor and into the car to a spinning group in Yea, or for someone to make their way to a paddock to bang on a Jamaican steel drum with several others as part of the Marysville band 'Pans on Fire'. The key is approachability and accessibility, employing locals where possible, ensuring budget is significant enough to provide adequate facilities, equipment, materials and promotion.

Ongoing collaboration and consultation with community is critical in enabling an arts-based approach to community recovery to be successful. For those in positions leading an art led recovery, it should be front of mind and integrated into everything they do. Minimising red tape is also important, and an arts administrator can play a key role in assisting here, enabling creative activities led by the community to happen in a quick and responsive manner.

The most important aspect of community recovery

I think the approach needs to be uniquely designed to each disaster. A community recovering from a bushfire will be different to a community recovering from a pandemic. A one size fits all approach would be unsuccessful. An approach that is non-consultative and non-collaborative would not work as the community would not feel or take ownership over decisions, projects or events.



FEATURED ARTIST



Leanne Mooney

Art Teacher, Kinglake Ranges

Background

I have worked as an Artist, Community Artist and Teacher. In 2009 I graduated with a Masters in Fine Arts from Monash University. In 2010 I was one of 11 artists selected by Regional Arts Victoria (RAV) to participate in the 'Illuminated by Fire' project. I also received RAV funding to set up and coordinate the Butterfly Studio. My artistic practice is sculpture.

Involvement with the arts in the Kinglake Ranges post 2009 bushfires

'Illuminated by Fire' was one of the largest state-wide arts residencies initiated in Victoria. Produced by Regional Arts Victoria, it took place over 18 months and across 11 regions. From Portland to Maldon and Swan Hill to Kinglake. 11 artists and their communities delved into the role of fire and its impact, creating projects which offered an extraordinary exploration of what it means to live with fire.

'Illuminated by Fire' celebrated the places we care about and the story and role of fire within those places. Working across Victoria, the project shared stories, increased understanding and created inspiring art, reinforcing resilience and celebrating place.

These projects were launched in their regional areas in November 2010, and were showcased in Melbourne in June/July 2011 as part of 'The Light in Winter' at Federation Square.

I was one of these artists and I worked with Hurstbridge Neighbourhood Allwood House and in St Andrews, Kinglake Neighbourhood House and at Butterfly Studio in Christmas Hills with people affected by the fires on the 'Memory Box Project'.

Involvement in community arts-based bushfire recovery programs

I was a founding member, President and Coordinator of Butterfly studio - this was set up as a bushfire recovery studio. Butterfly Studio has offered over 700 creative workshops, events and activities. We have contributed to dozens more projects and programs. Over 10,000 people engaged with our program. I was an artist involved in the 'Illuminated by Fire' RAV project and worked as an artist in the 'Into the Light' project with Whittlesea Council. I worked as an artist on bushfire recovery workshops including a book making and memory boxes.



I have worked as an art teacher at Kinglake West Primary School since 2009. The Kinglake West Primary School community were severely impacted by the 2009 bushfires. Working at Kinglake West I became aware that the community needed to rebuild. Art is a great way for people to come together, to talk and to create. I saw this time and time again working with various local councils on bushfire recovery community art projects.

The "Fractured Heart"

I was commissioned by Whittlesea Council to make a work that represented the effects of the fires. This work had different coloured ribbons pulling the heart in different directions representing the way some people felt after the fires.

I worked with the local Kinglake Ranges community on the 'Into the Light' project - a festival and lantern parade which included Kinglake West Primary in the annual lantern parade. Students made the lanterns at school and then their families were invited to come to the festival. The concept was simple - it was bringing light to the community, but also a way of rebuilding the community by coming together to enjoy art activities, film projections, school art work and music.



While much of the focus of the Kinglake community's recovery after the bushfires has been on the big things like rebuilding homes and businesses, the loss of small, but significant things like Christmas decorations, often made by young children in kindergarten or primary school, is a reminder of the loss that families have experienced. In this context, the schools 'Christmas Craft Day' became very important, as it provided families with an opportunity to make new decorations and new memories to replace those that were lost. This was also a great opportunity for the school community to come together and make something special.



My philosophy has always included working with students, colleagues, parents and the school community to connect the school to the wider community. The Whittlesea Art show is an institution in the region with over 10,000 works submitted. With this in mind our contribution to the Whittlesea Art Show is an important aspect of engaging the school community with the district. The students make a work of art for the show and families go to see their work.

Kinglake Ranges Community Art Projects

Kinglake West students have also had the opportunity to work on community art projects:

In 2014 Grade 5/6 students worked with a Parks Victoria Ranger to make ceramic tiles for the Lyrebird trail at Mason's falls in the Kinglake National Park. In 2018 Grade 3-4 students worked on a project with the support of Murrindindi Shire Council to make ceramic tiles that were installed at three sites along the Kinglake Heritage Trail. With the Kinglake Historical walk I worked with the three Kinglake schools, Kinglake Primary, Middle Kinglake Primary and Kinglake West Primary. I was working through Murrindindi Shire council and was under time pressure to make the tiles; work with the students on their designs, paint the tiles, get them fired and installed in four weeks. The time constraints created a lot of pressure. Luckily, the Kinglake students were very enthusiastic and they relished the challenge.

Kinglake West students painted flora from the Kinglake Ranges area, Kinglake Middle painted the birds, feathers and nests because they are close to the sky and Kinglake Primary School painted the fauna of the region.

When we were installing the tiles in the three locations near the schools we were also under time pressure because we were installing them into concrete and there was a time limit regarding the concrete setting. It was back-breaking work, but well worth it.

Impact of arts activities on Kinglake Ranges students, their families and the community.

Families were really more interested in rebuilding. The families that did make lanterns really enjoyed the experience. My students have been really lucky to be involved in so many community arts projects and this has been influenced by my interest in the arts. I believe that making art makes you happy. It is an opportunity to heal and be a part of something greater than you.

Positive flow-on effects of arts activities

The Kinglake West Primary School was engaged and happier and more focused. Kinglake community members were also happier and able to rebuild their lives. I saw this firsthand.

Collaboration with Kinglake Ranges community members and community groups

I was really scared when I started working with the Kinglake Ranges fire-affected community. I thought, "I am not a trained counsellor or psychologist", but then I realised I just had to listen and provide a safe, fun environment where people could make something that was meaningful to them. I loved this experience and it was as if all my life experiences and training had led me to be able assist the community in this way. I have been very honoured to be a part of the rebuild Kinglake Ranges community projects.



Challenges encountered within the community recovery process

Some people needed more assistance than I could offer. If I did this again I would work with a councillor so that everyone could get the help they needed.

Key things that enable an arts-based approach to community recovery to be successful.

It has to be fun and accessible to everyone. You have to have a positive focus and an ability to listen. This helps with loss and recovery, and you can also create new memories and lifelong friendships. I know it did not suit everyone. But for the people that did participate they loved it and I received a lot of positive feedback about the programs I ran, or were a part of.

I worked in a team at each project. This was the success of the projects - working collaboratively together. I met some wonderful people and I was really amazed at how everyone wanted to help rebuild the fire-affected communities. There was so much support from Councils, FRRR, RAV, Artists, friends and family - we all worked together to make this happen.



FEATURED ARTIST



Lee McGill

Glass Artist,
Former President KRA

Community

The Kinglake Ranges is a great place for the arts, art appreciation and knowledge. However, I feel it is divided in participation and joining groups. I came into the arts as an artist very late in my career, but have been embraced by all I meet and have been encouraged to participate in and run groups and workshops in the community. Having art shows and events well attended and the work exhibited of a high standard and of great quality has encouraged more community members to participate and exhibit.

Background

Initially I worked with glass and leadlight/stained glass. Through the industry I was introduced to kiln-fired glass art and embraced it. Since then I have concentrated on different art forms as my career and love to work on sculpture-type pieces with different materials.

Involvement with the arts in the Kinglake Ranges

It was only after the bushfires in 2009 that I became aware of the Kinglake Ranges Arts group. From that time, I tried to be involved with anything to do with the arts, including participating in events, running workshops and eventually joining the committee.

Activities of the arts group

At the time of the Dunally fires in Tasmania in early January 2013, the Kinglake Ranges Arts group was ready to move beyond their region to assist other communities impacted by disaster and trauma.

The 'Connect' project was a series of workshops held in various communities to create objects to donate to the Tasmanian bushfire-affected communities. This was a way for our community to come together and create, to talk and feel good about helping others. From our experience we knew that the people of Tasmania were at the stage where they needed winter warmers and words of encouragement from people who understood their situation.

The project received great feedback from our community, as well as making grateful connections within the Tasmanian community and art group.

Flow-on effect of these activities

The 'Connect' project evoked a positive response from the Kinglake Ranges community. It brought different people together and allowed the community to move forward, reflect on past events and appreciate their present situation. It enabled the arts group to plan and prepare for future events and encouraged many in the community to participate.

The 'Into the light' and 'Express Yourself' projects which were part of CoW, but also involved Kinglake Ranges residents. It encouraged many people to participate and learn new things; to appreciate how participation in the arts can assist individuals with their wellbeing and mental health and help communities recover from major disasters.





Collaboration with community and service providers

Collaboration was enabled by having a variety of arts-based activities such as Mandala making and leaf making, as well as exhibitions at anniversary gatherings. These events introduced more community members to the activities of the arts group and enabled an understanding what the group was trying to achieve.

Regional Arts Victoria (RAV) were very helpful and encouraging. Their support enabled us to provide workshops and run arts-based events. FRRR offered many grants which also enabled the arts group to run events, etc. The community/neighbourhood houses were also great to partner with.

Collaboration with the Historical Society and the Murrindindi Shire Council on the 'Kinglake Ranges Heritage Trail' was encouraging for all local artists. KRA worked closely with the Historical group and this became a great working partnership; both groups enthusiastic and passionate about the project. However, council procedures made it a difficult and protracted process.

Through the two groups, many community members supported the project and took ownership of the trail. School groups were delightful to work with and the students' participation increased community interest in the arts group.

Change in approach to recovery over time

By the time I became president membership had dwindled and participation was low; everyone seemed to be burnt out. The energy required in maintaining the committee and running the group was taking its toll. Many people wanted things to happen, but didn't want to be part of making it happen. I stepped in as president because nobody else wanted the position and I found the job a bit difficult and lonely.

The following year the group ended up taking a hiatus because nobody had the energy, or wanted to manage the group. Everyone was tired. Also, a lot of classes/workshops had been subsidised, so the majority of participants didn't want to pay and expected that situation to continue. It became difficult to run classes without some sort of funding which was becoming harder to source.

Key things that enable an arts-based approach to community recovery

Mainly assistance and funding from a wide range of organisations. Coupled with the support and enthusiasm of participating artists, the desire to participate and respond to arts-based activities then flowed on to the community.



Things that impede an arts-based approach to community recovery

The requirement from funding providers for recipients to produce expected outcomes was not helpful to community members, i.e. having to attend, show/exhibit their work, or produce a piece for another collaboration, etc. or comment about their wellbeing.



The most important aspects of community recovery

To be able to participate and enjoy being involved in arts-based activities just for the sake of doing it.
To have a broad range of options and not to have a 'one size fits all' approach. To be willing to try different processes and employ different ways of thinking. Not to judge anyone by their outcomes/what they produce.

The arts have proven successful for use as a recovery tool and they should be used and embraced by government and other organisations, as another service to be provided to communities and to be made available as an option to assist in their recovery and wellbeing.



'Tree of Love'

Decorated with leaves handmade in community workshops led by artists Lee McGill, Catherine Blakey, Gay Chatfield, Suzi Duncan and Julie van der Eynden for the 2019 'Growth' exhibition held in the Great Hall, Whittlesea Council Offices, 25 Ferres Boulevard, South Morang.

FEATURED ARTIST

Julie van der Eynden

Artist, Former President KRA



Community

Owning land since 2008 and building in 2009/2010, I have lived in Kinglake since 2011. Coming into a new community at any time pushes you out of your comfort zone to make new connections but coming into a traumatised community proved to be even more challenging. I made contact with the Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House (KRNH) in search of a creative outlet and as means of meeting people because they were offering botanical art sessions. They told me there was a local art group, but at the time they were not as active as they had been just after the fires.

In 2013-2014 I made contact with KRVPA (Arts Alliance) and participated in a couple of classes. It became evident that the current committee was burnt out and were looking for solutions to keep the group running. I volunteered to help and within three months (2015) I became the president of Kinglake Ranges Arts (KRA) or KRVPA as it was then known.

As I already had connections with KRNH, KRA became an auspice of the Neighbourhood House and we worked well together. My focus was on encouraging the community to attend talks by local artists who were invited to showcase their work. In the almost five years I was president KRA evolved from being a group that was totally reliant on grant money, but not particularly active, to a self-sufficient group running weekly fee-for-service classes engaging a growing number of participants.

Background

I was a graphic designer but always had an interest in anything creative. This interest began with a passion for pottery in my early school days and included porcelain and cloth-doll making, bears, and appliqué. I had facilitated some sculpting/bear-making sessions at my local community centre.

I joined the committee of the Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House (KRNH) and began assisting them with the design and printing of their program and the facilitation of their arts programs. Since moving to Kinglake I have taken up painting. KRNH received a small grant to make a pottery studio and I was encouraged to set this up and run some pottery classes. Having learnt a variety of painting methods and techniques over the past decade, from foundation through to abstract, I have recently begun teaching a mixed media class at KRNH.



Kinglake Ranges Arts post 2009 bushfires

Taking over from the previous committee, I inherited a grant that allowed us to run arts programs for three years. The first year we struggled to spend the \$5000 allocated money whilst finding our feet, but the second year we delivered around \$10,000 worth of sessions and the third year \$15,000 worth by encouraging participants to pay for materials whilst working toward a fee for service class.

We offered a variety of art classes, en Plein air sessions, excursions, trips, community gatherings and social nights. We participated in the town fair and other community events and began to run monthly articles in the Mountain Monthly. KRA partnered with KRNH in 2019 to run the 'Respect and Remember' exhibition and accompanying art sessions.

Through Mail Chimp, we continually updated and expanded our email contact list to 170+ contacts. I endeavoured to send information to these contacts on a weekly/monthly basis to maintain their interest.

I assisted KRNH to set up an art space/pottery studio in their double shed and this became a key area for holding art sessions, thus utilised heavily by KRA. This area is now very well set up as two studios which are regularly used for art sessions, but also by other community groups as an educational space for things like creating possum boxes with visiting students.

We maintained the partnership with Rotary to run the Kinglake Art Show and started showcasing works created at our sessions during the year.



I worked with St Peters Church Kinglake in their initiative to run a series of art therapy sessions to aid recovery and then designed and coordinated an art installation for the ten-year anniversary of the 2009 bushfires.



I actively continued the community conversation regarding an art space outlet in the hope that the RAC building would be available at some point – producing and presenting a PowerPoint presentation for the Murrindindi Shire.

I formed partnerships with RAV, KRNH and FRRR to employ an Arts Development Coordinator with whom I worked to complete a strategic plan for arts in Kinglake and identifying community needs for art.

In conversations with KRNH I began to conceptualise the water tank mural project. In 2018 a committee was formed and in 2019 we began working on governance and formalising roles. After five years as President of KRA, at the end of 2019, it was time for me to move on and work on my personal arts endeavours.

Impact of KRA's activities on the Kinglake community

Five years on from the bushfires the community was still fire-affected. Some people were struggling to reconnect with others, or commit to anything and often there would be trauma-affected people in class. Gradually over the period though I begin to see small improvements. It was not until after the ten-year anniversary of the fires that we begin to see improvement in community engagement. People were more able to reconnect and explore possibilities for social interaction.

Research shows that belonging to and participating in community not only improves personal wellbeing but helps people to make a place their home and therefor stay. Friendships are formed, sharing of experiences, building trust and learning to enjoy being part of something. Confidence is restored and people start to share their knowledge therefore building stronger communities.

Collaboration with community, recovery-based institutions and service providers

Initially participation was slow, but grew between 2015 and 2019. After the ten-year anniversary people were more enthusiastic; the new community began to explore their options and began to participate.

KRA partnered with KRNH to obtain a grant from FRRR to hold the 'Respect and Remember' 2009 Bushfire anniversary exhibition and accompanying therapeutic art sessions. KRA partnered with KRNH, RAV and FRRR to employ an Arts Development Coordinator.

Challenges within the community recovery process

I think the biggest hurdle for me was the transition from participants expecting to receive sessions and materials at no cost and changing that expectation to encourage them to see the value of the sessions and therefore be willing to pay a realistic price for services. Also, as artists had been doing so many activities as a volunteer or at a reduced cost, I began to work toward bringing their fee for services in line with what it would be if they were teaching elsewhere.



Kinglake Ranges Arts approach to recovery

We kept communication constant, sparking people's interest with exciting emails and offering a variety of sessions. Showcasing what we were doing and our achievements through the art show and Mountain Monthly, thereby creating more community awareness of the group.

Key things that enable an arts-based approach to community recovery

Inclusivity – what you are offering has to be achievable for all skill levels and financial circumstances. The environment must be friendly, welcoming and safe, both physically and mentally. The project being offered or produced should have a component that enables all members of the community to participate, not just artists.

The most important aspects of community recovery

A safe environment, warm and friendly facilitators, achievable projects, opportunities for ongoing participation, ownership and acknowledgement of those who participate and volunteer their skills and time.

My main focus for the arts in the Kinglake Ranges was, and still is:

- growing community participation in arts and crafts.
- providing opportunities for people to gather socially and belong to something in an environment where they feel valued and safe.

My future goals are:

- to place Kinglake on the map to be known as an artistic community.
- linking with multiple groups to offer a variety of creative programs.
- provide an outlet for artists to teach and showcase their work.
- offering locals and tourists options for buying unique Kinglake Ranges arts and crafts.

FEATURED ARTIST



Chrissie Eustace

Craft Artist / Rotary Member /
Manager Kinglake Ranges Art Show

Community

I moved to Kinglake in April 2008, ten months before the Black Saturday bushfires. Not long after this I became a member of Rotary. I found Rotary to be a community-orientated organisation and this appealed to me. Also, being new to the area Rotary membership provided the opportunity to make lots of new friends, some of which I have kept for over a decade.

Background

I completed my first piece of embroidery when I was only three years old. I learnt to knit and crochet by watching my mother in the mirror because she was left-handed and I was right-handed. That activity ceased when I started high school, but began again when I was in my early 30s. I was a member and past-president of the Embroiderers Guild in Queensland. I was a tutor with the Guild for over 20 years and for 12 years I ran school holiday classes for children. I have a love of textiles, in particular embroidery and patchwork quilting. I have dabbled in pottery and porcelain painting and still do a lot of woodworking with my husband.

My current position, as well as being convenor of the Rotary Art Show, is director of public relations and wordsmith for grant applications for Kinglake Ranges Rotary. Previously I was director of a company that remodelled the old Casino airport in Northern New South Wales into a caravan park and retirement village. I organised multiple events to bring people to that venue. I have also organised over thirty bi-annual festivals for all forms of arts and crafts, seminars on the RV lifestyle and other events involving motorhomes and caravans.

For the last ten years, every Easter I have organised an event for 'grey nomads' called 'Stone the Crows Festival' at Wagga Wagga which involves about 1000 motorhomes and caravans. The event spans seven venues for a period of seven days. I handle all administration, as well as bookings, finances, programming and publicity with two partners who are on the entertainment side.



Collaboration with Community

After the bushfires I started a small group in my sewing room with six neighbours to show them how to knit, crochet, embroider and do patchwork. This was followed by sessions involving a group of local mothers with children who were suffering badly as a result of the bushfires and I taught the mums to crochet. In every instance the classes became therapy sessions because I found if I talked to one participant, she began talking about the bushfires and how they had affected her. And then when I talked to another the conversation kept coming back to the bushfires and how they had affected her. I decided that the best thing to do was to bring all these people together and to keep talking, much the same as an AA meeting; to enable shared conversations and to provide companionship and support. That is how I came to the conclusion that the act of creating transcends any methodology. It is a perfect tool to enable connections between people. It is the glue, in that there is a common bond in sharing and participating in creative activities. People are able to share their problems and hopefully find solutions together.

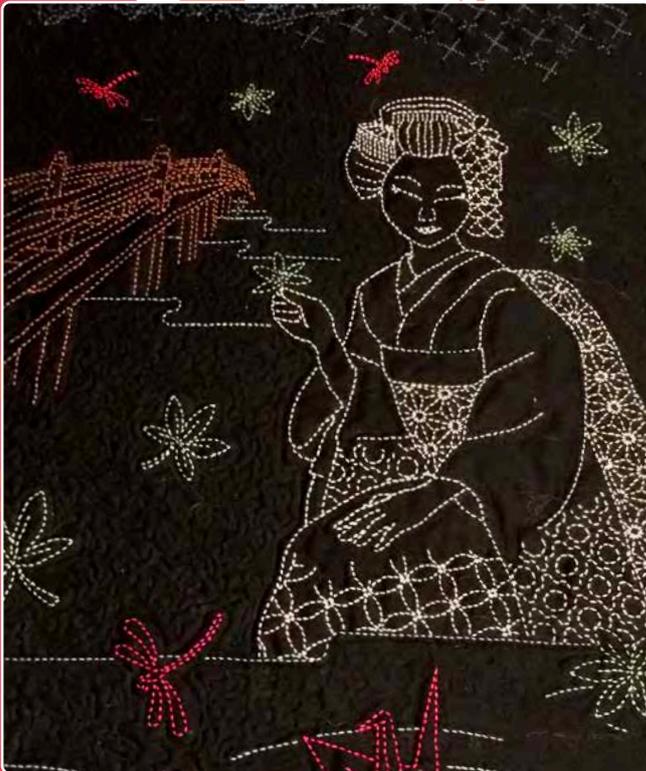
Involvement in community arts recovery post bushfires

My involvement with the arts in Kinglake after the bushfires came about because Michelle Bolmat, a fellow Rotarian and KRVPAA Artistic Director, wanted to initiate a collaboration between Rotary and KRVPAA to provide assistance with the Kinglake art show. My computer and management skills were recognised as potential assets which could be utilised within this partnership.

The first collaborative KRVPAA/Rotary Art Show held in the Kinglake West Hall was an outstanding success. As the art show continued to grow it eventually came under the control of our local Rotary Club in 2015.

I then added photography to the traditional 2D art entries, then single media, including glass and wood, with metal later added as mixed media. Soon after textiles were included. We then found that there were felt makers in Melbourne who were interested in exhibiting as they did not have many avenues to display their work. The idea that only traditional-style artworks could be a part of the show was to deny these and many other potential exhibitors. Since then, laser and CNC work were included, as was 3D printing to encourage the younger generation to create works with modern techniques.

Impact of the Kinglake Art Show on community post-bushfire recovery



What struck me about the post-bushfire recovery period is the difference that our little regional show made to people's lives. One example was an ex-army man, Chris, who phoned me and said, "I'm not sure if my work is good enough. Would you have a look at it?" He had sustained a very bad injury and was learning to walk again. While traversing his property he had picked up bits of broken twigs and began fashioning them into birds and other animals. The first piece I saw was an eagle that stood more than a metre and a half high. It was an amazing creation. He entered this wood sculpture in the Art Show and won the 'Encouragement award for an emerging artist over 25". He was absolutely stoked. He sold that piece for \$1500 plus \$250 for his award and received a certificate and a rosette. Twelve months later he exhibited more sculptures in our Art Show. His sister thanked me because she said I had saved him from committing suicide, as he was so depressed he couldn't see a way out. He has since gone on to win the viewer's choice award at the Melbourne Garden Show and has won competitions throughout New South Wales and Queensland. He has since become a good mate and a very dear friend.

I honestly think if our little regional Art Show can change people's lives like that, it's worth a million dollars.

Challenges encountered during the community recovery process

As after any natural disaster, the community can be fragmented, people tend to focus on their personal issues and often end up totally burnt out from trying to manage 'everything'. The building of collaboration between individuals and groups can be hard work; there are many underlying problems. I can remember one particular meeting with a group of people where I was told by one individual that I didn't lose my home, how dare I try to get them to be involved. I didn't understand why they needed to step outside their comfort zone. The fact that our home

survived but sustained nearly \$100,000 in damages which weren't covered by insurance didn't count... we were lucky! The argument with that person was never won, but others saw the advantages of coming together and sharing their creations. They understood that their work might not be perfect, but could encourage others to have a go, develop a new or inactive skill and create new friendships.

With my Queensland connections it was easy to network for assistance for materials to teach people, the volume of help was amazing. So part of the Art Show expanded to provide workshops in textiles of various sorts.

Businesses however, were still struggling to regain their sustainability and getting sponsorship was extremely difficult. We approached several philanthropic organisations and gained sufficient funding for the first three years. Sales of artworks were on the small money level, but it assisted our artists with some income and the minimum commissions charged provided us with a small nest egg for Rotary to continue its endeavours.



Most important aspects of an arts-led community recovery

The value of the Kinglake Art Show cannot be underestimated. For novice artists it has been a step into confidence and further creativity, for school children it has provided an assuredness that art in some form will continue to be part of their education process. For established artists it has provided the opportunity to network in another regional area. Most importantly, it has brought together the ingenious spirit of all who love imagination, no matter what media. Whether they create, tutor, learn, or just admire – a connection through the arts is a common and uniting bond which is irreplaceable.

I hope that the Kinglake Art Show continues to grow and make a difference to people's lives, to encourage all people to be involved in the arts in some way; to heal and move on to a brighter future.

I will never forget one little boy aged seven who was coming to one of my embroidery classes. His father picked him up one day and said, "Michael, this is really sissy." and Michael replied, "If I was painting with a brush and paint, would you think it was sissy?" His father said, "No." and Michael said, "Well, I'm painting with a needle and thread."

Michael's story encapsulates everything I believe about creativity and its positive impact on post-bushfire recovery through the making of art in all its forms. It doesn't matter how you create, or what you create with, it's the fact that you create.

FEATURED PROFILE



Jane O'Connor

Editor, Mountain Monthly

For more than 40 years, I have worked as a communicator and journalist in national and international media.

This has ranged from national and international politics to 'on the spot' coverage as a foreign correspondent in some of the world's most volatile locations and at executive level, making decisions regarding what should be covered. Having a front row seat at natural disasters, intense conflict zones, human tragedies brought about through the likes of famine and oppressive regimes and the lack of rights and resources suffered by too many, can make the world seem like a hopelessly hostile environment.

To subsequently survive a total wipeout when Black Saturday hit the community I had chosen to live in for the second half of my 'quieter life' could have been a totally derailing experience.

But, no matter how challenging the situation, there has always been a part of the human condition that continued to shine, overcome and record the very worst of situations. In the meanest of conditions, you could find people seeking ways to effectively communicate. You could also find a fierce determination to keep culture, art and creativity alive.

The child drawing on a scrap of paper in the harshest of environments; the sculptor fashioning something beautiful from the meanest of materials; the writers and artisans overcoming the odds to convey truths. The power of imagery to not only record a situation for posterity, but to capture environments and deliver messages of hope and a brighter future simply can't be underestimated or somehow separated from the human soul.

There is a wonderful quote by an unknown author that simply says:

"Art speaks where words are unable to explain"

In the process of my own recovery, the situation arose where our stalwart local publication, the Mountain Monthly, faced the challenges of all small, independent businesses. As a community owned not-for-profit, it had to stand on its own feet; did not qualify for grant funding; but was a crucial communications platform for the community and community groups to display their strengths and attract new members. For 40 years, it had been an unbiased, factual window on our part of the world that never missed an edition. It was incredibly important for this to continue, particularly after the devastation of Black Saturday.

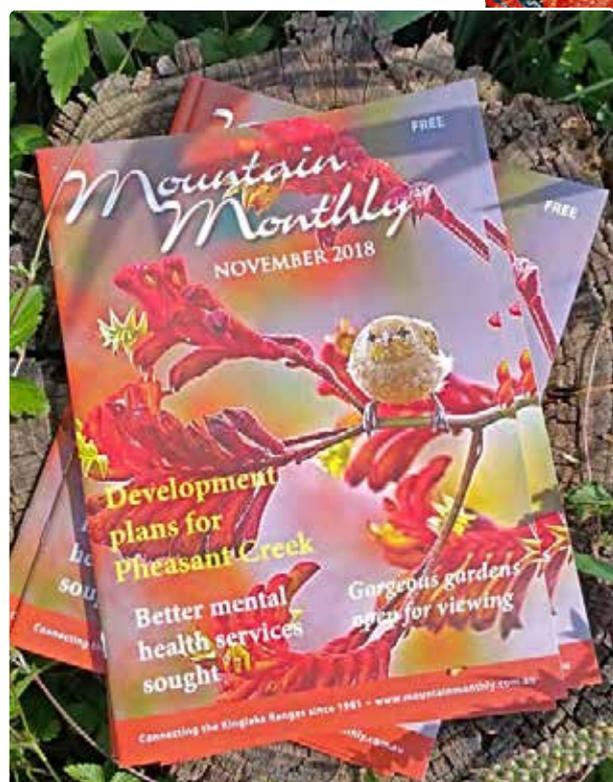
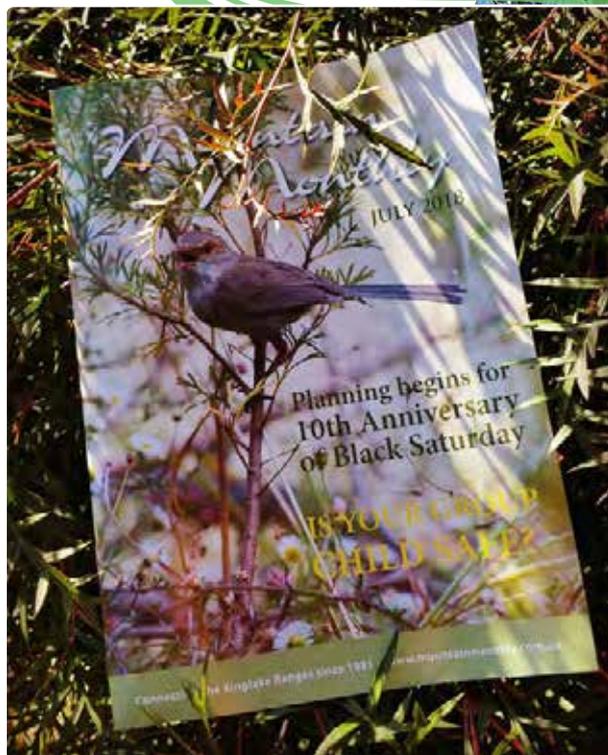
Rather than dilute its quality, the dedicated little team and its board went into overdrive to cut costs while increasing its quality, extending its reach, embracing an online presence and remaining a relevant window on our local world. That in turn allowed us to truly employ and reproduce a high quality power of imagery that captures the recovery spirit, community evolution and information dissemination that is so vital.

Every community requires 'lynchpins' to keep them knitted together. Without the right mix of ingredients, the seams can quickly unravel and take a great deal of time and effort to stitch back together. Our dedicated little team understood the power of 'lynchpins' – an important platform and a 'voice' that endures - and the aim became to accurately reflect the elements that define us as a community.

While groups, interests and individuals will always come and go and evolve, art and culture will remain and endure. It is an inarguable 'lynchpin'.

Anyone who cares to look back through each edition since Black Saturday would be seriously impressed not only by the diversity, depth of talent, the sharing of that talent to teach and embrace others, but also the employment of the power of art to heal the traumatised and bring people together.

We also consciously 'paint' a picture of our community through the photography we reproduce – the work of mainly amateur community members who are inspired by their environment. Whether having a consistent and competitive event to display work and keep raising standards; finding ways to promote brilliant artists in our midst; providing venues for individuals to connect with others and just 'have a go'; or moving forward into making art visible in our communities; we have covered, promoted and celebrated it and will continue to proudly do so.



FEATURED PROFILE



Deidre Hawkins

President Kinglake Historical Society / Writer / Editor

When I was born in 1941, my father operated the Post Office and General Store at Pheasant Creek. I grew up there and attended the Kinglake West State School for 6 years. I then travelled daily by bus to Eltham High School until I completed Form 6 (Matriculation) with a Teaching Studentship for four years of study at the University of Melbourne. I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Diploma of Education, and my first teaching appointment was at Mansfield High School.

I gained an early interest in literature and history from my parents and from my teachers at Kinglake West State School, all of whom encouraged the reading of classic novels and poetry suited to my age and also introduced me to the history of the Kinglake district. I enjoyed the stories my parents told of our family and the early days of the area, and our local history study at school made me aware of how much the district had changed since the pioneering days.

My life in Kinglake was the secure and happy life of a country child in a community where local families knew each other well and all attended the community events. I grew up participating in school and Sunday School activities, tennis matches and local dances, and I thoroughly enjoyed being surrounded by the people and the natural environment of my 'hometown'. In 1965, I married a local farmer and we brought up our family of three children in the same familiar environment. I continued my interest in collecting and researching the history of the area and formed a group with friends who shared this interest. This group was formally established as the Kinglake Historical Society in 1984. I have been the president since the formation and I have had the support of a strong team of dedicated members.



However, when the bushfires of 2009 overwhelmed the Kinglake district, I was already living in Whittlesea as we had retired from the farm in 2004. It was a sad experience watching the shocking disaster happening to my friends and my hometown.

Since leaving Kinglake, I had continued my work with the Historical Society but, because my licence showed that I did not have a Kinglake address, I was not able to go there during the road block period.

When I was able to visit the area, I was shocked at the damage, including the loss of so many historic houses and public buildings, including the post office and store which had been my childhood home. The Historical Society members were relieved and thankful that the building where our collection was stored had escaped the fire and we quickly realised that we needed to take steps to better safeguard the valuable and irreplaceable items in our care by digitising as much as possible and storing copies off the mountain.



I was disappointed that I had not been able to assist in the immediate relief work following the fires but I felt I could play a useful role in assisting with recovery projects, especially those that would replace lost historical items and make the history of the area more available to the residents of the area, many of whom were not aware of the interesting and unique story of Kinglake's development.

I attended community discussions and meetings in Kinglake where a number of recovery projects were identified. The Kinglake Historical Society decided that the three projects to which we could make the most useful contribution were the Kinglake Heritage Trail, the replacement of the Kinglake World War 1 and 2 Honour Boards, and the production of a book recording the history of the district from 1861 to 2009. When funding was contained for these projects, our work began.

A committee was formed for the Heritage Trail project with representatives from the Kinglake Historical Society, Kinglake Ranges Arts, Kinglake Business Network, Kinglake Memorial Park and Murrindindi Shire Council. The project was officially funded in 2012 and the trail was completed and opened in November 2016. Thirty boards, featuring historical information and local artwork, were erected along the 13kms of the trail, and the three local schools contributed handmade tiles at three major sites. My role was to collect and prepare the historical information and assist in the design of the boards. The trail enabled all residents to increase their knowledge of the proud heritage of their local area and the talent of local artists, and it also provided visitors to the area with an appreciation of the character of the district.

With assistance from RSL members and other local residents, the Kinglake Historical Society took a leading role in the project to replace the three Kinglake District Honour Boards. My role was to collect the names and liaise with the craftsmen who produced the boards. Funding was received in January 2011 and the project was completed for the official opening in November 2013.

The book, 'A Collected History of the Kinglake District 1861 to 2011', was undertaken on the initiative of the Kinglake Historical Society.



The project received funding in January 2011 and I was appointed in April 2011 to produce the book covering 150 years of the district's development. My role included research, compilation, writing, typing, page layout and editing, and members of the Historical Society assisted with proofreading. The book was completed for the launch at the 'Back to Kinglake' event held for the unveiling of the Honour Boards on 10 November 2013 and attended by over 300 people including present and past residents of the district.

These three projects were approved for funding on the basis of their contribution to the community recovery by providing information on recovery from previous bushfires, a sense of pride in the sacrifice and achievements of previous generations and reasons for hope for the future.

There have been some significant challenges during the years of working on these projects. Although the Kinglake Historical Society collection was intact, many families had lost all photographs and family information which made finding extra information from them very difficult. Our aim of making our collection material available to the public was hampered by lack of a suitable venue for display and research into family and local history. Several attempts failed but fortunately, in 2018, the Kinglake Historical Society was offered use of an unused building on the Kinglake West Reserve at a 'peppercorn' rental. We have now been able to develop a Heritage Centre there and it is being visited by schools' groups, Probus clubs, local residents and visitors to the district.



Our collection is valuable to all local residents, especially to the local schools and to new residents of the area, not only as a way to learn about the district's history but also as a source of advice for future bushfire events and the steps required for recovery. It is also appreciated by former residents who are pleased to see the work of previous generations acknowledged.

The books produced by the Kinglake Historical Society as a direct result of the 2009 fires were 'A Collected History of the Kinglake District 1861 - 2011' and 'Living With Fire', which was produced by Kath Stewart, who is a KHS member, and myself. 'Living With Fire' is a summary of previous fires in the district, especially 1926 and 1939, as well as the story of 2009 and the recovery, and it also includes advice regarding preparation for possible similar events. This book has been particularly useful to the Year 11 Geography classes who visit the Heritage Centre for their 'Disaster and Recovery' study.



In my opinion, community discussion and co-operation, respect for all views to reach consensus, and perseverance through the challenges are essential to the success of the recovery process.

The work of the Kinglake Historical Society is based on discussion, co-operation and respect, and we have persevered through some fairly daunting challenges.

We proudly dedicate our work to the pioneers of the district and all who have contributed to its development.



FEATURED PROFILE



Kath Stewart

Kinglake Radio / Writer /
Historical Society

Community

Kinglake is a semi-rural community on the fringes of the Melbourne metropolitan area. A large number of residents commute to Melbourne for employment. The area offers a greener, wide open space for family living. It is supported by most basic services, and is within reach of more specific services. I have lived in Kinglake for forty years, coming here as a teacher in the 1980s. I am a Justice of the Peace and serve the community in this role to meet the legal requirements of affidavits, statutory declarations, certified documents and signature witnessing. I have participated in many community groups over the years and currently I am a member of the Kinglake Historical Society, The Kinglake Neighbourhood Watch and a contributing writer to the Mountain Monthly, a local news magazine. I also write for enjoyment, in many forms including prose, poetry and song.

Background

My background is in education with a specialisation in the teaching of literacy. I am also a qualified ESL teacher and have completed a Diploma in Professional Writing and Editing. After a very successful 36-year career in teaching during which time I co-authored five books on literacy and multi-age education, I was able to pursue my love of writing when I retired from teaching in 2005. I have since been published in quite a number of newspapers and magazines, including The Age, The Leader Newspaper and The Rural Women's Magazine, as well as online. I have also written four songs which have been recorded by various artists. My work has also been included in a number of anthologies and I won the Pat Glover Memorial Storytelling Award at the Port Fairy Music Festival in 2016.

Involvement with the arts in the Kinglake Ranges post 2009 bushfires

Post 2009 I worked in a number of capacities with the ABC to produce stories of recovery and resilience. As a member of the Community Recovery Committee, I also worked with local visual and performing artists to aid community recovery through the arts. This entailed helping to organise music concerts and performances, art shows and



projects and a writer's display through a local writing group, 'Word Weavers'. I wrote regular articles for the local Leader Newspaper and also for the Mountain Monthly. I wrote regular features for the ABC website. I also facilitated writing workshops within the community to encourage others to tell their stories.

The work that the Kinglake Ranges Radio did to aid recovery after the 2009 bushfires

Kinglake Ranges Radio came to fruition with the valuable assistance of the ABC who assisted with equipment and personnel in the weeks and months immediately following Black Saturday. A studio was set up in the Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House and with the assistance of two ABC personnel – Simon Rogers and Louise Fitzroy – daily broadcasts were commenced from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. I worked with these presenters as a producer, co-presenter and local source of information during the months that the ABC was involved.

The enormous benefit of the radio station was immediate. One of the biggest challenges faced by the community in the wake of Black Saturday was the communication and the dissemination of information. The daily broadcasts which included interviews, news broadcasts, updated reports and information, live musical performances, participation of local school students all served to reassure and calm the community by keeping them informed of local recovery efforts and available support services.

Impact of the activities of the Kinglake Radio on the Kinglake Ranges community

The presence of the radio had a calming and reassuring effect on the community by being able to connect people with support services, government agencies, recovery projects and each other. It enabled the community to access much-needed information for their personal recovery processes, as well as that of the community. Many high-profile people, along with well-known local identities visited and participated in the radio programs which helped the community feel valued and supported. Kinglake Ranges Radio was able to provide a forum for questions, concerns and discussion about many aspects of the recovery process and about available support networks. People were assisted in accessing these services and provided with all relevant information.

There was also a wonderful array of local performing artists who were "uncovered" by the radio station and given a platform to perform and discuss their music.

Flow-on effects of these activities

All in all, the activities of the radio station and those of other community groups in combination, enabled a return to a more normal daily life, albeit one that was actively focussed on rebuilding and recovery. It brought the community closer together in a time of shared trauma, and helped to alleviate some of the effects of that trauma by keeping the community informed and reassured. The radio station was also pivotal in developing community awareness throughout the year of other communities who were experiencing similar traumatic events e.g. floods. A radio telethon raised in excess of \$30,000 for flood-affected communities in Victoria and Queensland. Our community has developed a reputation for its caring and compassionate response to those in need.

Collaboration with Kinglake Ranges community members and community groups

On the whole, the collaboration between both community groups and members was effective, supportive and productive. Groups who had attracted more support than they needed, in turn helped out other community groups who were less fortunate. There are, however, inherent difficulties in working with a traumatised community. Not everyone was ready, willing or able to engage at a community level. Some community groups initially struggled because of a lack of member numbers and other priorities for individual community members. Other groups were able to make strong and sustained contributions. These groups found a way through the trauma to express themselves and assist the community recovery in the process.

Challenges encountered within the community recovery process

The biggest challenge of all was that the community as a whole was traumatised and needed time and support to come to terms with what had happened. Recovery from disasters such as fires, floods, earthquakes or wide-scale health challenges must be community-driven and community owned. One of the biggest challenges our community experienced was the mistaken belief by some government agencies that a 'top-down' approach to recovery was the best way to go. This approach was ineffective and more importantly, inappropriate. We suffered quite a bit of setback from people coming from outside the community to 'take charge' and professing to know 'what was good for us'. Unfortunately, as often happens in these circumstances, politics raises its unwelcome head and can impede rather than assist recovery. When this happened, it had the effect of dividing the community and hampering any co-operation that would have most value.

Changes in approaches to disaster recovery over time

Since 2009, I have trained as a Red Cross Disaster Recovery mentor to work with disaster-affected communities. I have a better understanding of effective approaches and am much more aware of what works and what doesn't work. The recovery process must be community-driven and make use of established community leaders, rather than interposing people on the community. People are affected and respond in very many different ways to trauma and grief. This is a vital understanding when developing any recovery process and indeed can present a lot of challenges. People should be encouraged, supported and assisted in their recovery on their own timelines and in their own ways. Connecting people with available support services, and having these services readily available and with high degrees of flexibility is especially important.

Key things that enable a community-based approach to disaster recovery

Successful community recovery from disaster **MUST** be community-driven. It is important to tap into existing community leaders and strong community groups to lead this recovery process. Any attempt to impose processes on the community will fail, because there is no community ownership or 'buy in' to the

process. It is important that processes feature open, transparent and regular dialogue and communication with the wider community with opportunities for input, discussions, questions and concerns to be heard. There should be clear decision-making processes which are articulated to all those involved.

Approaches that would be unsuccessful

A top-down approach, which is often favoured by government agencies because it allows for easier delivery and accountability, has been repeatedly shown to be unsuccessful, but worse than that, can add to the trauma already being experienced. Any approach that does not allow for community self-determination is fraught with problems. Recovery processes will not be effective unless there are open, transparent and inclusive practices underpinning the process. For successful community engagement to occur, there must be ample opportunities for community input, discussion, feedback and involvement.

The most important aspects of community recovery

The most important aspects of community recovery are co-operation and cohesion, a bringing together of the community for a common purpose. Communities must be given sufficient time and resources, as well as ongoing support for as long as it is required and not pressured into meeting artificial timelines imposed by those outside the community.

Any access to financial aid and assistance in the recovery and rebuilding of disaster-affected communities should not be competitive in nature, rather community groups should be encouraged to work together to enable a whole of community recovery.

Timelines for the completion of recovery projects should be flexible and determined by the community. It is worth remembering that the people driving the recovery are traumatised and need assistance, not limitations.

One of the most valuable, effective and significant aspects of recovery from trauma is the beneficial and therapeutic nature of the arts – in its many forms. It has been said that art can regenerate neural pathways that have been broken by trauma. Not only do the arts offer a means of expression, but the very act of this expression, and enjoying this expression, has enormous benefits on individual well-being – for both the artist and the spectator. In recovering communities, it is important that avenues are provided for the arts to lead the community through the trauma. Kinglake Ranges Radio was one such avenue. Affected community members need to be provided with opportunities to confront and deal with their trauma and grief, whether it is through the visual arts, performing arts, or writing their story in whatever form helps most. Communities who adopt an arts-led recovery approach will be more successful in their recovery and individuals will benefit enormously in dealing with their own personal grief.

"You have something to give the world that no-one else can give because no-one else is you."

Everyone can make a contribution, no matter how large or small.

Brett Pollock

Brett Pollock is an artist, singer, songwriter and 'bricky'. A Kinglake resident for over thirty years with a passion for the mountains expressed in song, canvas, brick and stone. Also known as 'Dusty - 'the Singing Bricky', with over 80 original songs recorded independently with a passionate focus on art and music fuelled by the events of 'Black Saturday'.

Brett opened the 2009 'Reconnect' day with one of his original songs and performed others with the choir. In February 2010 KRVPA, together with Regional Arts Victoria, brought the 'Emergence' exhibition to Melbourne's Federation Square. Bushfire-affected artists from throughout Victoria participated. Brett provided musical support at BMW Edge and performed at a remembrance event at Government House, Melbourne.

Brett was one of three Kinglake artists commissioned to take part in a public art demonstration to raise funds in aid of the Royal Children's Hospital Good Friday Appeal in 2011 and donated more artworks in 2012 for the same cause.

Brett, aka 'Dusty Starr', produced the CD 'Kinglake Rain' recorded live in Kinglake in response to the fires, featuring the song, 'We feel the Fire'.



We Feel the Fire

*Red skies howling
Wild winds blow
Hurting leaves hearts
Black as coal
Burnt in flame
Burning hope
Lost in smoke
And still desire
We feel the fire
Crawl the ashes
Rest the souls
Fight the need
We grieve to hold
Now we see it growing
Now we see again
And still desire
We feel the fire
Red skies howling
Wild winds blow
Crawl the ashes
Rest the souls
Now we feel it growing
Now we feel again
There is still desire
And we feel the fire*

Brett Pollock



Lloyd Godman

Born in Dunedin, New Zealand and now living at the Baldessin Press in St Andrews, Lloyd has been exploring environmental issues through photography in combination with sculpture, painting and installations since the 1980's.

His work 'Entropy', a complex randomized projection work based on the disastrous bushfire inferno that devastated the St Andrews-Kinglake area of Victoria in 2009 was a feature at KRVPAAs 'Emergence' exhibition at Federation Square. Lloyd had received a grant from Regional Arts Victoria for this work which became part of the 'Bushfire Australia' exhibition at TarraWarra Museum of Art.

As part of the RAV grant Lloyd offered to run a series of workshops associated with the 'Entropy' project in bushfire-affected areas. He ran a day-long workshop for Kinglake participants in July at the Kinglake West Hall. The workshop outlined the visual strategies of gestalt principles of image design, how an audience reads these and more importantly how we can use them in visual image design to create images with visual impact. It also looked at the visual philosophy behind the fundamental course taught at the Bauhaus by Johannes Itten.



'Entropy - an exploration of fire in the Australian landscape'
Lloyd Godman (Featured in 'Emergence')
<https://www.lloydgodman.net/Fire/index.html>

Barbara Joyce

Now a Kinglake West resident, Barbara wrote the following poem describing the aftermath of the bushfires in the township of Strathewen.

She attached it to a tree near the bridge entering the township to offer support and words of empathy to her friends and the townsfolk of Strathewen.

There's a summer bush requiem
so silent it chills
It's drifting on ashes
through Strathewen hills.

There's no song at 'Singing Waters'
just an ashen lament
and trees that stood straight
are now blackened and bent.

Strathewen's history
is clouding the air
with soft powdery ash
and a wail of despair.

There are spaces without traces
of neighbours and friends
We are missing their faces
coming round the road bends.

We're sooty and sootaged
and waitin' for rain
As homeward we trudge
we're nursing our pain.

Our life's black + white
no colour between
just some sepia tree tops
to colour the scene.

We're drawn back to the place
where we want to remain
we're holding our friends
and sharing the strain.

1/3/09

Barbara Joyce

Mountain Ash

It comes around each year
that summer bush requiem
a dull ache
something inside is crying
it wafts in silently
stirring the leaves
rustling the memories
a hot coal burns

Displaced, alone
swept from the valley
there's gentle comfort
in the misty fog
wrapping around
touching black scarred trees
weaving through leaves
pain eases trauma ceases

Rising early
sitting at my window of light
panes of glass
heal pains of night
pink heath hems me in
a floral hemline
on skirts of earth
I feel grounded

Doric columns
of Mountain Ash
a forest cathedral
rays of sun
streak shafts of light
on spears of hyacinth orchids
standing tall
in their mountain home

Barbara Joyce

Neil Grant

Firestorm

I have loved words since I was a kid. I believe in their power to heal and destroy; their ability to inspire. I have always trusted words and they have never let me down.

During the fires in 2006 we had left early with our three children ahead of a fire that was drenched at the last moment by a miraculous storm. In those weeks I learnt the words that attach themselves to a fire: ember attack, spotting, front, flank, containment; they are the words of war. But words are not real until they force their way into your life.

On Saturday 7th February 2009 I watched words fill the CFA website. They told the story of a fire in Kilmore, that was spreading to Whittlesea and onto to St Andrews. I was off the mountain and my family were in Kinglake. In 2006 our plan had been to leave and, even though we were apart this time, the plan remained. During the week preceding what is now known as Black Saturday I had heard warnings of the worst fire conditions since 1939. Years of drought and a terrible fuel load were to be combined with temperatures Victoria had never before experienced.

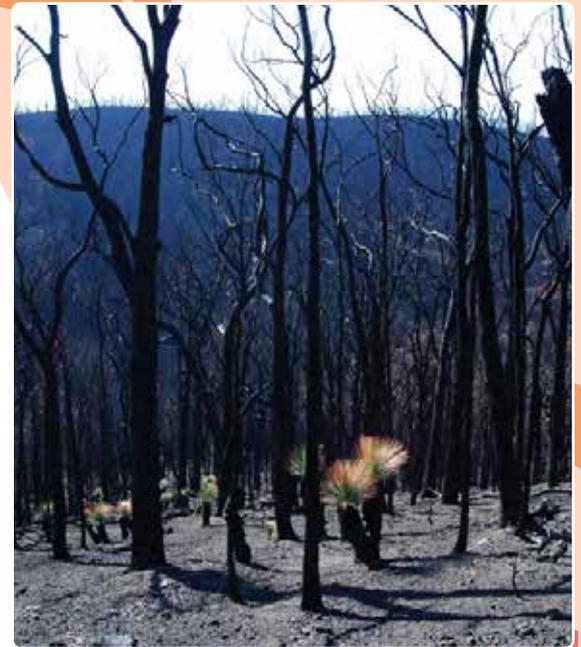


I texted my wife to let her know she should prepare. On Saturday, I listened to the radio all day and checked the internet for fire updates. I saw a huge orange cloud move towards Mount Disappointment and on to smother Kinglake. Around 5.30 that afternoon I was trying to pass on the words I had heard on the radio and seen on the internet. She needed to get out, the Whittlesea and St Andrews roads were already blocked, but Yarra Glen was still okay. She told me she had the cars almost packed and was leaving. Then she said, "The electricity's just gone, I have to go." Minutes later more words from the radio: Yarra Glen was under ember attack. The fire was moving too quickly.

I tried to call her again but couldn't get through. Finally, I got her message bank and said that I was coming up to help. I drove to get fuel, but by the time I was ready to go she was already on the Melba Highway heading towards Yea. She told me not to come, that they were all alright - her, our three kids and a friend from Germany, who had little practise driving a car on the wrong side of the road, had made it out ahead of the fire. "We are ok, don't come."

I tried to stay put. I mapped the fires spread through Kinglake using the CFA website's incident reports. I watched it surround our house and in my mind I pictured it peeling paint from the weatherboards, buckling the roof.

After 20 incidents I gave up and, throwing some gear into the car, set off to Yea. On 774 the reports were bad. Kilmore was ablaze and the Hume was blocked. I couldn't get up the Melba or through Whittlesea. The only path bypassed the fires using the Northern Highway to Broadford and then onto Seymour and finally to Yea. I drove for three and a half hours in a stupor as news of the fires came across the radio. The mountain was being savaged.



It was close to midnight when I got to Yea. The air was clotted with smoke and there were people camped on the median strip, goats tethered to cars, a stunned group mumbling in a barbecue shelter, parents trying to bed their children down in the pub bistro. There had been a war and here were the refugees.

Eventually I found the recreation reserve and my family camped in a tent. The kids were asleep, their arms above their heads, their hair sticky with sweat and ash. Our sixteen-year-old daughter sat stunned. She had been told her friend had died, a rumour that was later disproved. Our German friend appeared outwardly calm, she is training to be a doctor, but this was like nothing she had ever experienced. My wife and I held each other; for the first time in a year.

The night grew long. Smoke thickened. Ash rained down. Gradually, blankets arrived and some people got mattresses and pillows. The Red Cross ladies handed out sandwiches, cups of tea and kindness. Dogs barked. Kids shouted and laughed and fought and cried then grew quiet. The ground was soft and cool.

In the morning the police said the road to Seymour was safe and if we wanted to go we should go now. We lent a car to a family who had abandoned their broken down Volvo in the fire and, with another family, left in convoy. It was a solemn trip back to a reality that seems alien even now.



This is my small story. And among the others of heroism and fear and loss it is nothing. These words are nothing. They cannot describe the sorrow of losing so many people. Of losing a town. But I also still believe words are powerful and, when I listen to peoples' stories, there are words that mean something: resilience, strength, courage, hope, determination. These are the things that the fire could not take.

Neighbourhood & Community Houses

The importance of Neighbourhood/Community Houses to disaster recovery is undeniable. As people begin to get back on their feet and rebuild their lives, Community/Neighbourhood Houses can connect members of the community through social, educational and recreational activities that target loneliness and social isolation by offering a safe and inclusive space for participants. By participating in these activities, participants are given the opportunity to connect and establish a sense of belonging; to be a part of their recovering community.

Community/Neighbourhood Houses also provide longer-term support to assist with the ongoing recovery of individuals, households and communities by providing a sense of continuity which gives the community a sense of ownership over the recovery process.

Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House



'Tree for all Seasons'

A metal based marine cane woven tree installation that will become a permanent display within the Kinglake Ranges community. It includes the creation of felted, silk and sundry material leaves, flowers and birds hung on the tree to symbolise regrowth and recovery within the Kinglake Ranges. This tree was produced by artist Gay Chatfield and community members as part of the Respect & Remember exhibition.

Kinglake Ranges Neighbourhood House has a long history of collaborating with and supporting, artists and groups with art-related projects within the Kinglake Ranges Community.

Post disaster we saw people connect through creative practice and the benefit this had on community in being able to express their emotions and tell their stories by participating in various art related workshops and events. People also engaged with Art Therapists to create pieces of art utilising remnants from the fire.

KRNH auspiced grants for the Kinglake Ranges Visual and Performing Arts Alliance (KRVAAA) until they incorporated in 2010, after which they unincorporated, rebranded and returned to be an Auspice of the House in 2016 as Kinglake Ranges Arts.

Our Partnership with Kinglake Ranges Arts encourages community to engage through art, build social connection and develop their artistic skills in a positive, welcoming and safe environment.

The Makerspace Art Space and Pottery Studio was developed on site at KRNH in the shed that was built post disaster to support material relief recovery. This area is now set up as two studios which are regularly used for art sessions, but also by other community groups as an educational space for projects such as creating possum boxes and garden art.

Recovery takes time and in 2019 a partnership was formed with Regional Arts Victoria and community. The partnership funded the role of a Kinglake Arts Development Coordinator who supported art project development, increased collaboration between arts-focused groups and built capacity of local initiatives. As a result, the Strategy for Arts and Culture was developed with the community.

In 2018 a series of conversations occurred within community to determine what could be done at the milestone of the 10-year anniversary of Black Saturday which would be inclusive for all community and foster good mental health. As art was such a successful medium for community recovery, those who participated in the discussions felt that an exhibition would be a reflective way to depict the recovery and resilience of our community.

'Respect and Remember - The Kinglake Ranges Journey' was a six-week interactive exhibition embracing the journey of recovery and resilience experienced by the Kinglake Ranges Community.

The exhibition provided a space for the community to express feelings and memories regarding the 2009 disaster and reflect on the recovery of the region. It also provided an opportunity for individuals, schools and groups in Kinglake and surrounds to commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the Black Saturday disaster.

The exhibition was funded by the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal and took place at Ellimatta Youth Inc., which was a post-bushfire space gifted to the Kinglake Ranges and funded by Rotary International. Over 500 people visited the exhibition which was supported by a curator, exhibition coordinator, program officer and delivery support role. The roles were in place to enable community to engage and reflect in the experience.

The exhibition ran from 24 January to 22 February 2019 and provided the artists and community of the Kinglake Ranges with the opportunity to exhibit artworks and treasured objects recovered from the 2009 bushfires. It was a safe place for people with lived experience to reflect and new people who had moved to the community to experience and understand the journey together.

The exhibition highlighted the positive affect that an arts led response had to recovery on the community; and highlighted how the artists of the Kinglake Ranges were still providing comfort and messages of hope for a brighter future.



Toolangi Castella District Community House

The Toolangi Castella District Community House undertook several projects designed to uplift their community, one of which was a mural depicting the area before, during and after the fires.

The House displayed the various designs from local artists, collected feedback and subsequently collected and copied all the photos that were sent in by the community to form images on a mural by artist Janet Hayes.

"2009 - Recovery of a Whole Community"



"I do believe that art can play a big part in healing. After being affected by the fires, my family I had to leave our home for two weeks as it was unsafe to stay. My husband and the CFA had to defend our house, which was successful, and knowing friends, neighbours and acquaintances who lost their homes and a couple who perished in the fires, I felt I needed to do something positive. I also felt I needed to give back to the community that was supporting me through this traumatic time.

I organised an arts day at the Healesville Living and Learning centre, so that people who were affected by the fires could come and experience creating some art for a day free of charge. I asked artist Margaret McLouglin, from Steeles Creek, to join me in giving some free sessions and the HLLC provided the venue. Some materials were provided by Melbourne art company Art Stretchers for the day."
Janet Hayes

creating some art for a day free of charge. I asked artist Margaret McLouglin, from Steeles Creek, to join me in giving some free sessions and the HLLC provided the venue. Some materials were provided by Melbourne art company Art Stretchers for the day."

Janet Hayes

Additional post bushfire arts-led recovery projects

- Organised the first year anniversary event for the community.
- A new Community House was built providing a more usable venue for House programs and community events.
- Worked with the community group to establish a Community Garden.
- Ran bush wood furniture building courses which became the catalyst for the establishing of the Toolangi Castella Men's shed.
- Organised and ran the ten-year anniversary remembrance events 1) Photo exhibitions in the C J Dennis hall, 2) Event to mark the ten years at Central Park, the site of the Toolangi memorial, 3) Community dinner.

Flowerdale Community House

The Flowerdale Community House supported many bushfire recovery projects one of which was the local entry in the 'Illuminated by Fire' project which quickly gained the support of the entire community.

"Illuminated by Fire" project

As part of Regional Arts Victoria's state-wide project 'Illuminated by Fire' ten extraordinary projects were installed at Melbourne's iconic Federation Square in 2011.

One of these was a sculpture by local Flowerdale artist Sharon Collins. Following the Black Saturday Bushfires, Sharon was inspired to create a sculpture symbolizing the unity and bond of the Flowerdale community.

The end result was a large light box in the shape of a tree; an image adopted by the community as a symbol of renewal. This tree symbol has now been tattooed on over 100 local residents. Once illuminated and adorned with resin hand casts taken from hundreds of community residents, the tree celebrates the sense of unity that has emerged from this tragic event.



Resin Hands for the RAV 'Illuminated by Fire' - artist Sharon Collins.

Illuminated by Fire – A Regional Arts Victoria Project

Artistic Director: Donna Jackson

Curator of Stories: Malcolm McKinnon

RAV Director: Lindy Allen

Production Coordinator: Julia Earley

Artists Rising

A new beginning for the artists of Kinglake

Over the Easter weekend of 2009, the first time that Kinglake was opened to the outside world, people from neighbouring regional and metropolitan areas visited the township. They saw the devastation and heartbreak, but also listened to inspirational music, heard voices united in songs of hope, and reflected on the strange and wonderful way in which art in all its myriad forms can provide a special insight into the heart of a community.

KRVPAA artists, musicians, singers and performers, writers and poets and the Kinglake Phoenix Choir came together to provide entertainment and art displays in an effort to lift people's spirit and help the community recover and move on from the bushfires. The 'Big Tent' in the centre of Kinglake was the venue for the first post bushfire exhibition, aptly named, 'Artists Rising'.



Naomi Benheim

Shortly before the Easter weekend Naomi Benheim, a local leather artist, had come across a bunch of red flowers, (Red Hot Pokers) growing near a burnt-out tree trunk and thought about the beauty 'crawling out of darkness'. Oblivious to the more structured post-bushfire recovery activities and being surrounded by 'tourists' visiting Victoria's latest 'attraction', there and then she decided to utilize this friendly curiosity to help Kinglake's artists and musicians. It was at this moment that the idea of a four-day Easter art exhibition was born.

First, she gathered the support and participation of Kinglake, Toolangi and Flowerdale artists and musicians, which was easy in some cases, but needed a lot of coaxing and motivational dialogue in others. The 'Big Tent' had recently been erected in the township and was being used for a variety of purposes, including daily community briefings, so it was just a matter of getting permission. The area also had a few office pods which were used by DHS, etc. Naomi secured permission to store the artworks overnight in those premises for the duration of the Easter exhibition.

Next Naomi needed advertising. She designed a flyer and the local printer donated these. She was lucky to get the help of two fellow artists who volunteered to distribute the flyers. They went all the way to Camberwell, Toorak, Burwood, South Yarra and the city of Melbourne, plastering the flyers on walls and inside shop



Linda Haggart

windows. Naomi brought in twenty of her own exhibition easels to help accommodate the many artworks. As well as these, the artists experimented with tables and chairs and assembled makeshift display stands using the temporary fencing which had been provided by Citywide Temporary Fencing. 'Set-up' was the first time that many artists smiled and actually laughed in a long time. There was nothing like the company of fellow artists and musicians to feel whole again. The aim was for the artists to heal and be released from their numbness.

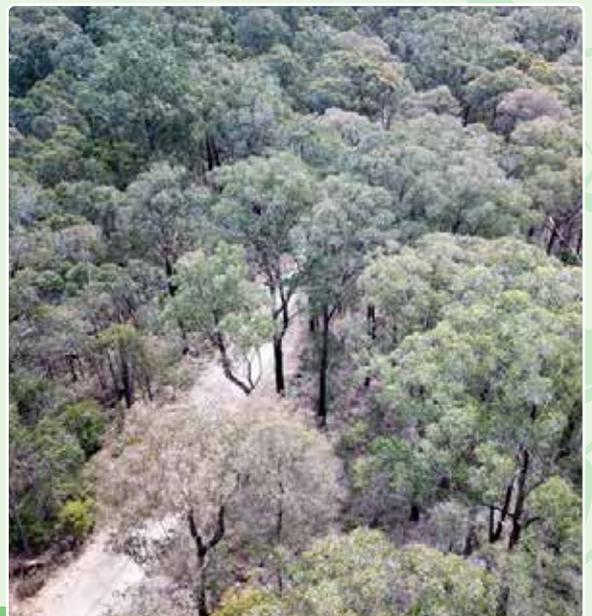


Michelle Bolmat

Musicians and performers managed to collect enough instruments and sheet music to provide live entertainment while the writers and poets also displayed their works to the delight of visiting public. The response from locals and tourists was immediate and electric. People flocked to the marquee and enjoyed the first event of this kind since the bushfires. Visitors had their first tentative look at the devastation caused by the fires but more important, the first insight into the strength and resilience of the Kinglake community.



The Easter weekend event heralded the beginning of the Kinglake Ranges arts-led journey of recovery from the devastation of Black Saturday; a journey which would span many years and involve both artists and the community of the Kinglake Ranges.



To see more of KRVPA post bushfire exhibitions and events please visit the online version of the Digital Archive:
<https://kinglakeranges.com.au/digital-archive>

Conclusion

The **Digital Archive for Arts Recovery** is an historical record of the Kinglake Ranges arts-led recovery from the 2009 bushfires and a testament to the indestructibility of the human spirit. It is also a visual record of the power of art as an instrument of recovery for communities affected by disasters such as Black Saturday.

The artists featured in the Kinglake Ranges **Digital Archive for Arts Recovery** have shared their personal journey of truth and recovery to show that art can not only be a reflection of historic events, but can provide the means by which communities can recover and move on from the devastating impact of events such as the 2009 bushfires.

Images and text by the artists, poets, writers and songwriters depicted in this archive often refer to devastation and heartbreak, but they are also a reflection on the strange but amazing way in which art in all its myriad forms can provide a special insight into the heart of a recovering community.

The recovery process is long and difficult and can span the course of many years. Projects such as the **Digital Archive for Arts Recovery** can have a profound impact on post disaster recovery and may continue to play a role in community recovery for many years after the original event.

Ode To Renewal

The sweetest place is now
the yesterdays are tucked away
blackened memory trees
shine golden in the sunset light

The gentle shafts of morning light
delight in lyrebird madrigals
recorded love poems of the bush
they're always listening

There is gratitude midst solitude
there are honest truths
and there's rumours around
artists are painting the towns

Barbara Joyce

Ode To Renewal



The objective of this archive is to provide overwhelming evidence that the arts can be a major contributor to the recovery and rebuilding of communities - spiritually, emotionally and culturally, whether they are affected by fire, flood, or any other catastrophe.

The people of the Kinglake Ranges were devastated by the February 2009 bushfires. Their lives were in turmoil and their township ravaged. Only the black shadow of a devastated landscape remained as dark memories permeated the fabric of the community. However, there was a beacon of light in the darkness as the artists of Kinglake endeavoured to uplift their community and tell their story of hope and renewal. The story of the artists' efforts to rebuild, reinvigorate and reshape their struggling community through art, stories, music and song has been stunningly captured and preserved in this archive.

The aim of this chronicle is to provide visual and literary evidence that the arts play an important role in disaster recovery and that art in all its forms can be a powerful catalyst in rebuilding strong communities. It is envisaged that the Kinglake Ranges **Digital Archive for Arts Recovery** post 2009 bushfires will provide inspiration for future generations of artists and remain a valuable resource for recovering communities throughout Australia.