

# **The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia**

**Report by Ms Ruby Reid. 2006 Churchill Fellow**

## ***Engagement of People with Disabilities in the Arts and Community Cultural Development***

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## ***Introduction:***

My Churchill Fellowship research involved visiting an array of disability focused organisations that include arts programs for people with disabilities in their daily service. The organisations I visited were in the United States and United Kingdom. The focus of the research was to ascertain the degree of innovation of those organisations and to gather information in order to develop innovative models of disability service delivery, particularly relating to the arts and community cultural development, that can then be deployed in disability service organisations in Australia.



## ***Executive Summary:***

My overall experience with this research trip introduced me to the notion that artworks created by people with disabilities can be contextualized as part of the *Outsider Art* movement.

As my research unfolded I came to realise that there was no service in England that was anything like Cascade Services, at which I work, in Redcliffe, Queensland, in which arts and community cultural development are embedded in daily service delivery for people with high support needs. This alerted me to the innovative nature of our own service delivery model and work with the arts being done at Cascade Services. This presents a number of opportunities for cascade Services in training and consulting work in the overseas market.

It also became apparent during my research trip that very few disability focused organizations anywhere in the United Kingdom, USA or Australia have a well developed and fully accredited training or continuing education program in the arts and disability studies.

I found that some service models developed by organizations in the UK, specifically in relation to developing skills of people with disabilities to become professional performers, are models that definitely are worth developing for Cascade Services and other Australian disability focused organisations.

Other programs I encountered in the USA, that were developing collections of art by their clients and by people with disabilities in general, some of which toured internationally, have no equivalent in Australia. Cascade Services is well positioned to develop these kinds of collections for exhibition in Australia and internationally.

One major finding of my research was that successful disability arts organizations in the United States and United Kingdom received substantially more government funding than comparable organizations in Australia. Queensland Arts and Disability focused organisations need to have substantial and significant improvements to funding levels. Currently Australian organizations, such as Access Arts in Queensland, have a decrease in funding. In particular more funding must be made available to respite and disability focused organisations for arts based programs.

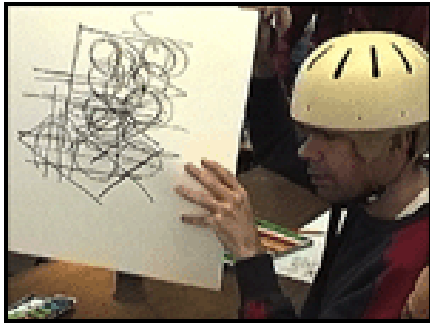
Furthermore, my research indicates that more emphasis needs to be placed on the arts in *Disability Studies* courses from Certificate III level to Frontline Management. Currently there are no modules on the arts included in these courses.

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## *Program Summaries:*

### OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, USA.

#### *Creative Growth Centre*



#### SUMMARY:

Creative Growth Centre (CGC) is a large organization that engages in a lot of activity with significant diversity of activity. CGC support sixty-five clients each day. I felt there wasn't enough space for that many clients to be effective.

CGC own their building – a big plus. They are currently running a huge donation program to raise one million dollars for renovations. The ability to develop the site as they please, due to the fact that they own it, is a great advantage.

CGC supports a small number of their clients for professional development and the commercial sale of their work. The rest of the clients seemed to be there for more recreational reasons.

CGC has a publications program. They publish books on the artwork of their clients. Two books in particular focused on the artists Judith Scott and William Mitchell. These publications were of a very high standard.

Positive things I encountered were the integrated gallery and shop. I found this quite inspiring. The exhibitions held at CGC are not reliant on renting space in other galleries, which enables more creative control and an ongoing building of the organisation's profile. The exhibitions have a very social feeling – they include a band and food is provided.

Most importantly CGC frames the artwork of their clients in context of *Outsider Art*. CGC's Director travels to network in this field and promote the work of his clients. As a result artwork by CGC clients goes to New York and Boston for commercial exhibition

and sale. CGC also have a relationship with Raw Visions, a magazine featuring Outsider Art, and the artwork of CGC clients is often published in the magazine.

The CGC gift shop sold a range of t-shirts, mugs etc featuring the artwork of CGC clients, particularly that of William Mitchell. I felt that this was a good model and something that could be developed at Cascade Services.

The only negative things I encountered were the overcrowding - I felt the staff couldn't possibly attend to everyone's needs - the fact that CGC is not integrated with non-disabled artists and the fact that CGC doesn't include persons with significant physical disability and/or high support needs.

### **MADISON, WISCONSIN, USA.**

#### ***VSA Wisconsin***

##### **SUMMARY:**

VSA Wisconsin has two program streams. The main one is an outreach program to schools. This activity, working with children, is a larger version of a similar program at Cascade Services - the open days on which children from local 'special schools' come to Cascade and are exposed to our programs.

The second stream at VSA Wisconsin involves working with adults. There are approximately twenty to thirty clients in this stream.

VSA Wisconsin is located in a rented office building. There is a Xmas card making workshop and dance therapy (exercise) program. The clients of VSA Wisconsin are mostly people living with downs syndrome. There is no-one in wheel chairs. VSA Wisconsin mainly run courses at night for workers. They are currently designing a program of professional development working towards exhibition of their clients' artwork.

VSA Wisconsin also has a permanent collection, of about one hundred or so pieces, of artworks by people with disabilities. Some of these artworks are retired each year and new works are purchased to maintain public interest in the collection. The collection occasionally tours other galleries.

VSA Wisconsin has an integrated community choir which practices at night.

The staff at VSA Wisconsin were very interested in Cascade Services' programs.

## *Waisman Centre*



### SUMMARY:

The Waisman Centre holds the *Harvey Stephens Collection* of art focusing on artwork by people with disabilities. The collection was developed by Harvey Stephens, who was a former director of the Waisman Centre. Stephens put out requests across the globe for pieces of art from people with disabilities. The collection includes art from places as diverse as Malta, Norway and Australia. The collection has toured in the past but not for some time.

Most of the artworks were collected in the nineteen-seventies. I found this interesting because this pre-dated the set up of Creative Growth and Gateway, two influential services. The collection includes a lot of work done by people in institutional settings at a time when artwork of people with disabilities wasn't recognized or validated. None of the artists whose work is in the collection were paid – all the works were donated.

I found it disappointing that some artists were only acknowledged by their first-name. One artwork from Australia was merely labeled 'Shirley from spastic centre'. I felt this reflected the attitude of the time that people with disabilities were not 'full persons'.

I found it interesting to note that an artist from Norway, a person also with a disability, was acknowledged by his full name and a bio stating he had full professional membership of a Norwegian artist society. This was in stark contrast to the Australian artist Shirley.

## **BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, USA.**

### ***VSA Massachusetts***

#### **SUMMARY:**

VSA Massachusetts featured a Gallery featuring artwork by people with a disability and programs in schools. VSA Massachusetts was more interested in collating directories of museums and cultural venues in Boston and rating their physical accessibility.

I didn't feel that there was much that VSA Massachusetts had to offer in terms of ideas that we could develop at Cascade Services or in disability services in Australia.

Charlie Washburn, a staff member of VSA Massachusetts, put me in touch with Laurie Berenger of *Berenger Gallery* as well as informing me about *Gateway Arts and Crafts*, another disability focused organization in Boston.

### ***Berenger Gallery***

#### **SUMMARY:**

This gallery focusing on Outsider and Folk art is directed by Laurie Berenger. Berenger Gallery focuses or specializes on promoting and exhibiting outsider art by people with intellectual disabilities and folk art from a range of cultures. Berenger Gallery regularly exhibits the artwork of William Mitchell, from Creative Growth Centre. His works are often priced at \$800 USD which would give this person with a disability a significant return for his work.

Berenger Gallery showed an impressive dedication to this field. Ms Berenger herself worked at *Boston Art Gallery* and museum for twenty-five years where she developed programs to provide gallery/museum guides for people with disabilities. Ms Berenger is also involved with *Gateway Arts and Crafts* as a consultant.

Ms Berenger also provides informal 'training' for collectors on how to view and collect this kind of work.

Berenger Gallery is particularly interested in the provenance and 'freshness' of the artwork.

## *Gateway Arts and Crafts*



### SUMMARY:

Gateway Arts and Crafts is part of a larger program that provides other services such as accommodation. There is also a strong focus on therapeutic arts. Gateway is a huge service which I found very similar to Creative Growth Centre. Gateway provides support to approximately eighty clients per day.

The space is divided into workshop space and a Gift shop.

I felt there was poor presentation of the artwork by the clients which was a real shame as the artwork was often very beautiful work. I also felt it was sold at prices that were very expensive.

The artworks on display were mostly works on paper. There was very little work on canvas.

Gateway supports mainly people with intellectual disability and mild psychiatric disability. They promote a handful of artists. Gateway also produce cards with their clients' artwork as well as mouse-pads, coasters, placemats, and mugs.

Gateway also has a publication program. They publish mainly booklets that include the writing and drawings of people with a disability. They also produced a coloring book which I thought was excellent and novel.

Gateway has an area dedicated to jewelry making. Clients are supported to make jewelry which is sold commercially through up-market fashion shops.

Clients also make ceramics, dolls, remodeled clothing and scarves which are sold in the Gift shop.

Significantly, Gateway also frame artwork in the context of 'Outsider Art'.

## ***Anthony Patrillo Collection, University of Illinois***

### **SUMMARY:**

The Anthony Patrillo Collection features Outsider Art, including Creative Growth Centre artists. They also produced a book, titled *The Anthony Patrillo Collection*, which featured Müna Lagerholme – an outsider artist who had depression and painted from dreams. I had multiple discussions with Ms Lagerholme’s daughter.

The artworks were collected from as long as twenty-seven years ago which gives them an interesting place in such collections of work by people with disabilities in that it covers the timeframe in which people were initially institutionalized, then exiting institutions and beginning to be viewed as ‘whole persons’.

## **LONDON, ENGLAND, UK**

### ***XPOSURE Festival***

Xposure festival no longer existed. They had been defunded. I was unable to make contact.

### ***Heart and Soul – Deptford***



### **SUMMARY:**

*Heart and Soul* is a theatre company in the south east of London, among the Caribbean community. It is located in a disadvantaged area which is starting to be reinvigorated due to artists moving into the area as the result of inexpensive rents.

*Heart and Soul* is based in *The Albany Theatre* which also houses a community centre. The primary focus of *Heart and Soul* is hosting cabaret events four times a year. These events are very successful, though costly averaging at a cost of twenty-five thousand pounds each. The cabaret events are called *The Beautiful Octopus Club*.

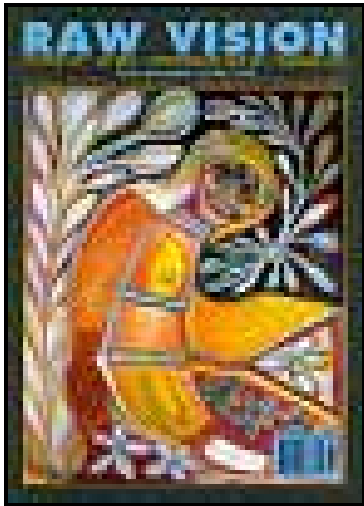
*Heart and Soul* train theatre staff, work mainly with people with downs syndrome and other intellectual disabilities. Over four hundred people attend their cabaret events.

Each cabaret event has four stages including multimedia and lightshows. *Heart and Soul* also work with a small group of three or four people to develop skills to become professional performers. They also stage another event called *The Squid Club* which is for children.

*Heart and Soul* is funded by a government arts council and some private sponsorship. They work with other community groups to travel the club to regional centers. They have been established for fifteen years and doing clubs for ten.

I felt that this model was something that definitely would be worth looking at in terms of developing something similar for Cascade Services and for Australian disability focused organizations in general.

### ***Raw Visions – Hertfordshire***



#### **SUMMARY:**

Raw Visions is a magazine about Outsider Art, edited by John Maziel. Maziel is an academic and founder of Raw Visions. He has also written a book called Raw Creation.

The journal features art by artists working outside the mainstream, such as those with intellectual disabilities and mental illness. The magazine's main market is in the United

States and Europe where Outsider Art is valued by collectors. John Maziel has also compiled a directory of galleries that specialize in promoting and exhibiting work by Outsider artists.

In my conversations with John Maziel I learnt a great deal about Outsider Art which more or less began in Nineteen-Seventy-Five when John Debuffet coined the term 'art brute' which translates as Raw Art.

Raw Vision often features artists and exhibitions of the Creative Growth Centre.

My experience with Raw Visions solidified my feeling that the artwork created at Cascade Services should be presented in the context of Outsider Art in order to acknowledge the professional quality of the work and to develop markets for its sale and exhibition.

### ***England and Co. – Notting Hill.***



#### **SUMMARY:**

Jane England, the director of this art gallery, was once a key exhibitor of Outsider Art. In my discussion with Jane she said that in the UK there was no interest in Outsider Art and that she would no longer exhibit artwork by anyone who had been institutionalised.

In this discussion and others I came to realise that there was no service in England that was anything like Creative Growth, Gateway or indeed Cascade Services. As a result I concluded that an opportunity exists for Cascade Services, and other similar Australian disability focused organisations, to act as consultants for organisations in England.

LEICESTER, ENGLAND, UK

*The Richard Attenborough Centre*



SUMMARY:

*The Richard Attenborough Centre* is a centre for continuing education. They stage events such as cabaret nights and debates about issues affecting people with disabilities.

*The Richard Attenborough Centre's* continuing education program is fully integrated, that is people with disabilities and people without disabilities study and work side by side in a fully integrated way.

Their focus is the 'inclusion' of people with disabilities. They do not work with people with disabilities exclusively.

Their education program is certified and accredited which is something Cascade Services is moving towards developing itself – fully accredited training programs in disability support, management and other topics.

GODSTONE, SURREY, ENGLAND, UK.

*The Orpheus Centre*



SUMMARY:

*The Orpheus Centre* was established by Richard Stilgoe, the composer for *Cats*, fifteen years ago. It is based in what was his family home. When a freeway was built nearby Stilgoe was going to sell but decided instead to turn it into an ‘independent living skills centre’.

*The Orpheus Centre* has spaces for twenty-seven people mainly with cerebral palsy. They are mostly young people between eighteen and twenty-five. The clients move from their homes all over the United Kingdom and stay at *The Orpheus Centre* full-time for three years.

The centre has a lot of accommodation, a theatre and music studio.

The staff at *The Orpheus Centre* believe that through music and performance therapy people with disabilities can develop confidence to live independently. In the United Kingdom many people with disabilities still live in institutionalized settings. *The Orpheus Centre* sees itself as a bridge between institutionalized settings and independent living. This is a model that has more or less vanished in Australia.

*The Orpheus Centre*, sadly, had no focus on professional development.

## GLASGOW, SCOTLAND, UK.

### *Project Ability*



#### SUMMARY:

*Project Ability* occupies the third floor of a warehouse owned by Glasgow City Council. The space is similar to the space that Gateway occupies. The service has two galleries and two sets of funding.

There is Health Department funding to support the physically and intellectually disabled which funds one gallery and one workshop space

There is separate funding from a government mental health department which funds a separate gallery and workshop space for people living with mental illness.

*Project Ability* work with a core group of people with a disability who don't attend any support service and just come in and work on their own individual projects. Other people with disabilities come with support workers and are slotted into a more formal support program.

*Project Ability* has a regular exhibition program. They are open to exhibiting artists from all over the world. For instance - one of the exhibitors had been discovered when his mother died. This person was basically a 'shut in'. He was eighty years old and when the social worker went into his home she found piles and piles of drawings.

*Project Ability* also do outreach programs in remote regions of Scotland. They will soon be moving to a purpose developed space alongside other community organisations.

## *Sounds of Progress*



### SUMMARY:

The patron of *Sounds of Progress* is also Richard Stilgoe, of *The Orpheus Centre*.

*Sounds of Progress* run workshops in music and composing. They have a resident band. The level of disability is not high. They are limited in part because they hire their workshop space.

They employ professional musicians and, like Cascade Services, have produced CDs of music written and performed by people with disabilities.

*Sounds of Progress* programs run mostly at night and at weekends. They have collaborated on projects with project ability.

### ***Some Conclusions and Recommendations:***

1. My overall experience with this research trip introduced me to the notion that artworks created by people with disabilities can be contextualized as part of the *Outsider Art* movement. The more research I did, particularly my conversation with the editor of *Raw Vision* magazine, the more solidified my feeling that the artwork created at Cascade Services should be presented in the context of Outsider Art. Doing so would enable a more serious acknowledgement of the professional quality of the work and would also enable the development of markets for its sale and exhibition.
2. As my research unfolded I came to realise that there was no service in England that was anything like Cascade Services. As a result I concluded that an opportunity exists for Cascade Services, and other similar Australian disability focused organisations, to act as consultants for organisations in England.
3. A key thing I noticed during my research trip was that all of the organizations I visited had their own independent publicity and marketing team. I feel that if Cascade Services, and other services like it in Australia, are going to grow and be more and more integrated into the community, we need targeted marketing and promotions teams.
4. It seemed apparent that few disability focused organizations anywhere in the United Kingdom, USA or Australia have a well developed and fully accredited training or continuing education program. Therefore I feel it is key that Australian organisations take the opportunity offered by this lack and develop fully accredited training programs in the arts, disability support, management and other topics.
5. I felt that the service model developed by *Heart and Soul*, specifically in relation to developing skills of people with disabilities to become professional performers by staging events, such as *The Beautiful Octopus Club* and *The Squid Club*, is something that definitely would be worth looking at in terms of developing something similar for Cascade Services, which already has a music program and band, and for Australian disability focused organizations in general.
6. In my research I encountered a number of organizations that were developing collections of art by their clients and by people with disabilities in general. Some of these collections toured. I was inspired by these examples to develop a collection at Cascade Services of artwork by its clients, which had already informally begun, and to organize elements of that collection to tour to community galleries in Australia and, eventually, overseas.

### ***Further Recommendations:***

1. That Queensland Arts and Disability focused organisations need to have substantial funding. Currently organizations, such as Access Arts, have a decrease in funding. More funding must be made available to respite and disability focused organisations for arts based programs.
2. More emphasis on the arts in *Disability Studies* courses from Certificate III level to Frontline Management. Currently there are no modules on the arts included in these courses.

### ***Actions Already Taken From Results of Research:***

1. The renting of an industrial space, now known as *Artell Community Arts*. This was inspired by Creative Growth.
2. Development of performance workshops also housed at *Artell*. This was influenced by my visit to *Heart and Soul*.
3. The establishment of a ‘user pay’ continuing education program at Cascade Services influenced by *The Richard Attenborough Centre*.
4. The establishment of a gallery and shop to be housed in the *Artell* space. This was inspired and influenced by *Project Ability* and *Gateway Arts and Crafts*.
5. Publication of *Not Just a Pretty Place*, a book about the innovative service delivery of Cascade Services, with an After-word including Churchill Fellowship research.
6. Presentation of a workshop called ‘Space-making’ based on current practices at Cascade Services with a component including research garnered during the Churchill trip at *Thinking Outside the Chair* disability services conference in May 2007.

#### NOTE:

Due to severe snow storms and a train derailment in which I was trapped in a train for some hours I was unable to visit the organisations in the North-West of the United Kingdom. These organisations were *North West Disability Arts Forum* in Liverpool, England and *Disability Arts Cymru* in Cardiff, Wales. However I visited significantly more organisations than was initially planned as the ongoing research lead me to more appropriate organisations.