

Singing, dancing and smoking for country: using arts, music, photography and performance to improve the health and wellbeing of communities in the southern Wheatbelt

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Pilar Kasat is the Managing Director of Community Arts Network Western Australia (CAN WA). Pilar believes in the power of community arts to engage meaningfully with communities and to inspire people to have a voice. Under her leadership CAN WA has consolidated its current position as peak body for community arts and cultural development in WA and is a role model for community arts organisations across the country. Over the past five years, CAN WA has established two Aboriginal arts and culture hubs that deliver self-determined arts and culture program to the communities of the Wheatbelt, with a focus on Aboriginal employment which now reflects 40% of the CAN WA staff. Her career has included diverse roles as a community artist working with artforms such as filmmaking, theatre and sculpture, and in arts management on festival coordination and cultural planning. She is currently completing a Masters degree at Murdoch University that looks at the relationship between culture and sustainability. Pilar has presented widely at conferences and critical discussions on themes such as arts and health, multiculturalism, cultural identity and global sustainability issues. Her recent appointments include the national ADC Cities Forum on enhancing liveability, and the Community Cultural Development Leadership Forum organised by the Centre of Cultural Partnerships at the University of Melbourne. Her extensive travel through Asia, South and Central America, Europe and Australia continues to deepen her understanding of the relationship between culture and community healing and wellbeing.

Dr Dave Palmer teaches in the Community Development Program at Murdoch University in Perth. He spends time travelling through remote Australia, looking for examples of projects that are having a positive impact on Aboriginal people's lives. He's come to the conclusion that in places like the Southwest of WA, Kimberley, Pilbara, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in Central Australia, Alice Springs town camps and the northwest of Tasmania; the use of arts, performance, music, dance and film is often what makes a difference. He believes that to work successfully with complex communities you need to be artful, use a repertoire of creative methods and learn to improvise. Dave often gets to travel with his partner and two boys, lugging around swags, books, cameras, a MacBook Pro, a diablo and a poi.

Geri Hayden coordinates the Southern Wheatbelt Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Development program out the CAN WA Narrogin office that services the wider Southern Wheatbelt region of WA. Geri's career objective is to *'build a bridge to close the gap between government programs and its service deliveries to the Aboriginal community.'* Geri grew up in Brookton and has worked extensively throughout the Southern Wheatbelt of WA. Geri has over twenty years experience working in Aboriginal Noongar communities and worked for over twelve years within the Narrogin District Education Office, delivering education based programs for Noongar young people across the Southern Wheatbelt region. Geri has also worked in cultural development with the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council and City of Fremantle Council.

Community Arts Network WA (CAN WA) is a not-for-profit organisation that facilitates community arts and cultural development programs for community health and wellbeing.

CAN WA's work is founded upon the need to involve local people in processes that help them track the past, understand and critique the present and use their imagination to consider how things can be different in the future. It encourages projects that use the arts both as a way to invigorate community, and community involvement as a way of invigorating the arts.

In 2010, CAN WA established an extensive community arts and cultural development program in the Southern Wheatbelt. The 'Strong Culture, Strong Community' program is based at CAN WA's Narrogin office and services the wider Southern Wheatbelt communities of Brookton, Wagin and Pingelly. CAN WA Narrogin employs three Aboriginal staff to carry out this work.

This program involves the facilitation of arts-based activities and initiatives with Aboriginal communities living in Southern Wheatbelt towns. These workshops shape creative development work leading to performances and exhibitions such as *Voices of the Wheatbelt* publication and films, animation work, song writing and recording, lantern and doll making, cultural dance and multimedia production.

In this session CAN WA's Managing Director Pilar Kasat will talk with academic Dr Dave Palmer and Aboriginal Arts and Culture Coordinator Geri Hayden about some of the lessons learnt in the use of art to improve the

health and social conditions of people living in regional Western Australia. In particular they will discuss how the use of arts, new media and performance provide opportunities to bridge the conceptual, cultural and social distance between non-Aboriginal organisations who are committed to improving the health of community and Noongar people themselves.

