

# SIP - Jackson Street Mural Activity

## 19<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> March 2009

### Why are we doing this?

A well-loved community mural had been accidentally painted over by a City of Port Phillip council contractor. The council found funding to create a new one.

The area surrounding Fitzroy St is one of the major 'hotspot's in the area and this alley is a particularly contested space. It offers access to Fitzroy St for locals, tourists and visitors. Locals complain that it is used as a toilet and that the graffiti and general state contribute to a lack of safety in the area. The laneway had an abundance of graffiti on most of its walls.



### Where this was done

The activity was conducted over six days in the un-named alley connecting Jackson and Fitzroy Streets (opening onto Fitzroy Street directly opposite Park Street) in St Kilda.

### What we were trying to do

The SIP project offered to manage the mural activity as it felt that it would provide a great opportunity to engage a broad cross-section of the local community around the theme of "Belonging in St Kilda". The SIP was commencing a process to specify its aims and objectives for the next three years; it was important that the views and aspirations of the St Kilda community inform its priorities.



### Who were we targeting?

The main target groups were residents of St Kilda's rooming houses and those in contact with agencies such as the Salvation Army Crisis Centre, Sacred Heart Mission, Inner South Community Health Service, Galiamble and other local service providers. In addition the project presented an opportunity to engage with more transient groups in the area – most notably a group who often 'hung around' the Gatwick Hotel in Fitzroy Street. The project also hoped to reconnect with many of the local residents and children who were also involved in the original mural.



### Who was involved?

The project was planned by Robyn Szechtman (SIP) and Camille Monet, a community artist who lives in the Jackson Street area and has

led community mural projects of this kind in the past.

### What we did

Camille spent the two weeks leading up to the project publicising it. She produced a flier and poster, but the key methodology was to spend time talking to people at Sacred Heart lunches, near and outside rooming houses and on Fitzroy Street about the mural. She specifically targeted established groups – for instance the Arts group at Sacred Heart - and made sure that they would participate in the mural activity as part of their regular program. Key support workers in various agencies in the area were encouraged to bring down their clients and Camille also expanded her hours to accommodate a local koori art class prior to the official commencement of the project.



When painting commenced, a large banner was placed adjacent to the mural. It asked three questions; What does belonging mean in St Kilda; What makes you feel like you belong in this community; and does St Kilda feel welcoming and accepting?. During the project, Camille was constantly present and informed all passers by of the activity. Some chose to paint something that symbolised St Kilda to them. Others placed a comment on the banner and some did both.

It was envisaged that the mural could be completed in four days, but it actually took six. The daily hours were considerably longer than the three hours originally planned. Food (sausages with salad) and drinks were available throughout.



### What we found

People enjoyed this activity both as participants and as onlookers. Many passers by expressed the opinion that the final product was a real positive addition to the laneway. The mural was a good way of guiding people to think about their community and their feelings about it. The activity seemed to have broad appeal – gender, age and socio-economic status in particular did not appear to be barriers to participation.



One participant who painted on five of the six days reported that there had been only one negative comment. This was made by ‘... a grumpy man....’ who was very upset that ‘.... Now I can’t piss on this wall anymore. I’ll have to find somewhere else’. General feedback seemed to be that this was a positive activity - “... its great to see this happening in the neighbourhood.”

A strong example of this was an impromptu approach from the Chair of the Fitzroy Street Traders’ Association on day 3 of the activity. She indicated that her organisation was very supportive of this type of activity and could well

be interested in funding future initiatives. The association is an organisation that SIP needs to engage with – however it was not envisaged that this activity would provide that opportunity.

The responses to the 3 questions can be seen in the appendix. In summary, they reflect the positivity of the mural activity, unhappiness with levels of intoxication (alcohol) in the area and a need for more public toilets.

### What worked well?

The flexibility of the lead artist was an important factor. The project overran on each day and by two days. People were given time to engage and as such, strict timelines were difficult to follow.



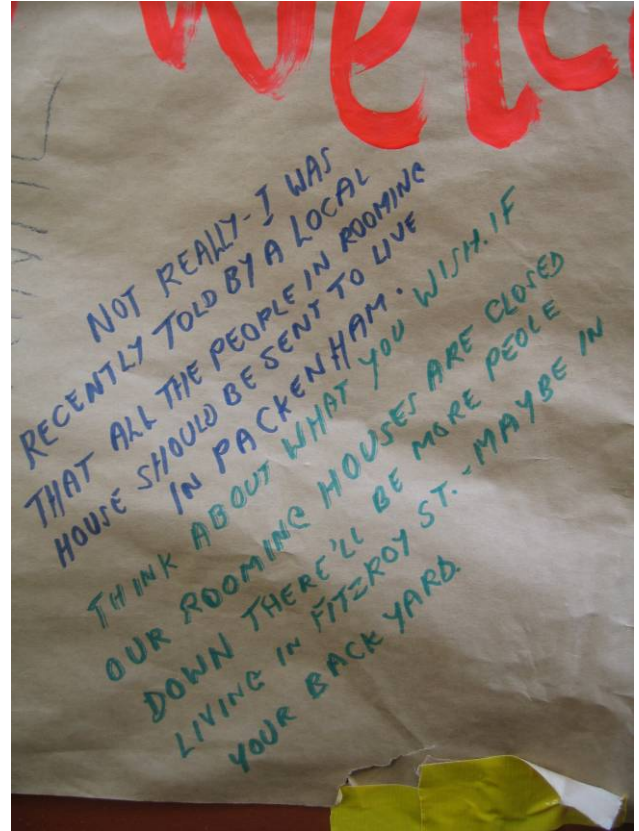
A number of participants returned day after day and organically took leadership roles in the activity. This was evidenced by them engaging passers by in conversation about the mural and the themes behind it. This was helpful from a practical point of view, but also demonstrated a considerable level of community ownership in the activity. One participant was employed to put a coat of anti-graffiti paint on the completed mural. Two passers by challenged him as he did this, checking that he was not defacing the recently completed artwork. This indicated a level of community ownership had developed over the mural.

### What did not work so well?

The lack of a toilet facility was problematic. The project manager and the lead artist were able to use the artist's flat, however a number of people started painting, left to use the toilet and never returned.

The artist (Camille) was a continuous presence throughout. She expressed the feeling that she

was not always able to focus on the banner questions and comments, as well as support those painting. Better consultation could have occurred if another artist / worker was there to share the load in juggling these priorities.



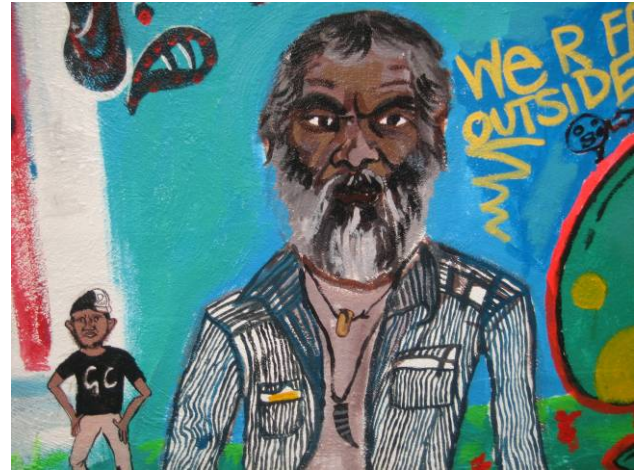
### What others can learn from our work

The coupling of an easily accessible activity, with a very visible end result seemed to be useful in creating a space for the sharing of ideas and aspirations. Given the location of the laneway, the 'passing trade' represented a broad cross-section of residents in the local area.





A strength of the activity was its accessibility. It was equally attractive to those who considered themselves accomplished artists – whilst others lacking confidence to create a masterpiece contributed via handprints or simple messages.



The SIP team believes that further consultations and activities of this kind can be used as vehicles to achieve a number of SIP objectives around engagement, participation and community strengthening. The SIP team is planning how to refine and develop this activity to feed into the upcoming Goals Identification project.



The confidence and competence of staff to manage the site were important. On a number of occasions, passers by and participants arrived at in the laneway intoxicated. The ability of staff to judge when to engage / not to engage and to manage the activity safely was critical. An assessment of risk – and a clear management plan should be produced to support the delivery of these types of activity.

### So what?

The wall in the laneway is graffiti free, vibrant and colourful, as well as being reflective of a range of residents' perceptions of St Kilda.

One core participant was employed on a casual basis to apply a protective coating to the mural. The same participant has subsequently been engaged in SIP's Audiotour project, expanding on his perceptions of life in St Kilda.



### Thanks to

CoPP (Youth), CoPP (Minor Works), CoPP (Health and Community Development) Camille Monet (artist)

## Summary: Jackson Street Mural Activity 19<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> March 2009

### Appendix

Number of participants	77
Number of core participants	5
Gender	Approx 50/50 split (feedback from artist)
Number of young people	14
Number of over 50's	8

Core participants – participated on 3 or more days

Young people – Under 18

*Given the nature of the activity, no register or records were gathered. As such, the figures above are indicative and are based on the recollections of the artist and project manager*

#### **What makes you feel like you belong in this community?**

- Being by the water walking down the street and knowing people by name.
- I live and work in St Kilda. I hope that I live and work here forever!
- I feel very safe in St Kilda and I'm very happy to be here.
- I can walk everywhere.
- When you get to know the people on the streets they look after you.
- Yes, because of the original European influence. I like the bars and the cafes but not the chain food shops.
- It's one of the nicest communities I've ever lived in.
- The people and being near the beach.
- Growing up here, memories friends and family.
- Being me and having friends and family.
- Diversity
- Music
- Art
- People are mostly friendly.
- You can get a feed at night from the food vans.
- This art project helps me connect to St Kilda.
- I was living on the street and found shelter here.
- Friendship.

#### **What stops you from feeling a sense of belonging?**

- Fear is the mind killer.

- Police fat police
- Violence
- Racism
- Crime
- Intoxication
- Prudes, snobs and elitists
- Noisy neighbors
- Tourists and Drunk People – BOGANS For real – be a traveler...Love culture, you dream and to see
- Noisy night clubs
- Police
- Tourists who are not respectful of St Kilda
- People pissing in the alley
- No more tourists or beach functions and drunks
- Be responsible for your own comfortability

#### **Does St Kilda feel welcoming and accepting?**

- Hey piss head! Where is the closest urinal?
- St Kilda is full of NIMBYS.
- Not really. I was recently told by a local that all the people in rooming houses should be sent to live in PAKENHAM! Think about what you wish for! If our rooming houses are closed down, there will be more people living in Fitzroy St. Maybe in your backyard.
- I find the locals friendly.
- Yeah, love the ART!!!
- Only to some people. Need more compassion and understanding. Need more toilets too!!!