

# The 2012 South Australian Regional Centre of Culture

just  
add  
water

## what

Just Add Water - a metaphor for creation, growth and renewal

## why

To build creative momentum over a year, laying the foundation for future development

## how

One year, one South Australian regional community, 443 arts events

*Just Add Water* was a year-long program of arts and culture managed by Country Arts SA in partnership with the Alexandrina Council, through the South Australian Government's biennial Regional Centre of Culture program.

The 6000 people who live and work in and around Goolwa tallied nearly 54,000 individual appearances between them – an average of 9 per person – making art, seeing and hearing art, sharing art and thinking about art.

The Regional Centre of Culture model acts as a catalyst: by injecting a diverse range of high quality arts and cultural experiences from outside the region, while simultaneously stimulating and supporting local strengths and assets, a program with a local flavour builds a creative momentum over the year and lays the foundation for continued future development.

By taking part in a diverse range of art happenings, people have had profound experiences that will have a lifelong impact. While some people simply chose to dip into selected activities, for others participation in a project led to a whole new initiative.

Shifts in outlook can be heard in the stories people tell about themselves and their community and there is a growing awareness of the rich living culture of the Ngarrindjeri people.

Two major infrastructure developments, at Centenary Hall and Signal Point Gallery, created hubs where people gathered to share arts experiences across myriad artforms.

# Community impact

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## Welcome to art town: engaging the community

By engaging people on their own terms, trust was built and the response was enthusiastic. Skilled artworkers stimulated local interest and involvement in community art, and publicly displayed work attracted attention from the wider community. Landmark events early on helped to raise the profile of arts and culture and set the tone for the rest of the year. Many people has 'first time' experiences and many expressed excitement at having arts on their doorstep.



"Putting it really bluntly, (the community) are less scared of art. It's not a thing that happens 'over there with those weirdos'; it's something that 'I'm' involved with."

"It has been a lot of fun and some seriously talented people have gained the confidence to come out of the woodwork! The arts genie is well and truly out of the bottle on the South Coast and I for one think it's fabulous."

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## Coming of age artistically: stretching the boundaries

Local artists, both emerging and established, were supported by opportunities to expand and extend their practice. A great diversity of creative practice was showcased and opportunities to explore ideas about 'what art is' and what it can be were plentiful.

"I had forgotten the 'I can do anything' attitude I (once) had...I think it got buried under the mountain of washing and dishes, but (you) have shown me all over again that even at nearly 50, I don't just have to dream in my own little head...I can do anything!"

"The (Wooden Boat Exchange) allows people to see work by artists and tradespeople from the area that are often unseen/invisible. This must enrich a kind of 'cultural self-worth' in the community."



## The right to learn and play: art across the life course

*Just Add Water* catered for a wide range of ages - from babies to those in their 90s - and engaged groups by partnering with community organisations. Creative expression of the stories shared by local people about their lives helped to 'democratise' art and culture. Art work presented diverse, inclusive and respectful views of the community.



"Some of our older community members found that they were not too old to learn something new or experience something different."

"There's a classic photo of that young kid with James Morrison... an example of how they really did integrate with the community - all those people came...but they weren't just watching... they were being part of it, and hopefully that young man see that that's his future: 'I'm going to be on the world stage like James Morrison'."

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## Accommodating Art: inside and outside the square



Innovative use of existing indoor and outdoor spaces and places was cultivated for creative purposes and as a model for future practice. Building community capacity by fabricating exciting temporary structures and spaces was a striking feature and capital development with an emphasis on adaptability made many new things possible and created a springboard for the future.

“Everybody loves what’s happened to Centenary Hall. People were going “... what on earth made council choose those colours? Then you tell the story of Percy Wells and how they were the colours he chose but wasn’t allowed to use back in the 1920s... so now it’s just what Percy really liked...it just creates more stories about Goolwa and connects people to the stories.”

“the fact that Kondoli encompassed the whole community was fantastic. One day ...when I was helping put it up at Strathalbyn Primary School, with a couple of little blokes running around supposedly helping us, one of them took off and grabbed his mum...he was pointing out the part that he had actually created...and then other kids started coming too...”

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## Legacies: tangible and intangible effects that last

*Just Add Water* 2012 has left behind a substantial range of legacies for the community to build on - tangible, permanent reminders in the art works and functional infrastructure, profound experiences.

“Many people define legacy in terms of tangible things that you can see and count...but they’re not understanding the...quality of life.”

“...having the whole year for people to get used to has been very important - the opportunity to get to know the people, to consolidate friendships and understand that it wasn’t just a flash in the pan.”“

“...the new experiences will encourage people who might have thought about organising...something in the past and probably thought, ‘Nah, that will never work in Goolwa’, I actually reckon it will give them the get up and go [to say] ‘I reckon we can do it. Let’s give it a go.’”



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## Creative collaboration: behind the scenes

Partnerships between funding bodies, government and non-government agencies, community groups, private organisations and the community itself and fostering community conversations throughout all underpinned the success of the program. Volunteers were the backbone, emerging as a powerful community movement, and lessons learnt will help the community build on the momentum from 2012.

“I think that one example (of positive outcomes) would be the volunteers for the galleries. That is now a network of people; a lot of them didn’t even know one another before...As a consequence, that group started to feel a bit empowered, and it saved the theatrette. WE saved the theatrette. WE saved Signal Point, and that was because we had a network.”

# Where to find the evaluation report

Independent Consultant Dr Christine Putland has delivered an extensive evaluation report demonstrating the profound impact *Just Add Water* has made on this community.

The report is presented in three parts and can be found online at [www.countryarts.org.au](http://www.countryarts.org.au).

## part 1

### ***Just Add Water* in a nutshell**

A brief overview of the whole program and its main outcomes

## part 2

### **Feedback on Program Elements**

Relevant to those who are looking for examples of detailed responses to elements of the program

## part 3

### **Perspectives on the Community Impact of *Just Add Water***

For those who want to understand how the program works and its community level effects.

## The Future

*Just Add Water* will continue to make a difference to the lives of people in Alexandrina through a Federal Government pilot initiative, Cultural Places, enabling a four-way partnership between the Australia Council, Arts SA, Country Arts SA and the Alexandrina Council to capitalise on the tremendous groundswell of support and to spread the artistic love throughout the region.

Along with the community of Rockhampton in Queensland, the Alexandrina region will take part in this three year pilot study (2012-2014) which will be independently evaluated as a research site to inform decisions about the potential for, and value of, broader applications of the Cultural Places initiative across the nation.

