



A fundraiser for the  
communities affected  
by the  
Victorian Bushfires

# Newsletter

Volume 7, Issue 1

Written, compiled and edited by Deborah Smith

November 2009

## Welcome to our eighth and final newsletter for 2009: Our support is still needed...

Current fundraising total: **\$37033**  
– Could we have imagined?

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, having finished (only for the moment though – until the burnt out schools have been rebuilt and the next phase of instrument purchasing occurs) the business of supplying musical equipment to the fire affected communities, we need to continue raising funds to support our efforts to help these communities heal through the power of music.

Several projects have been undertaken and many more are being planned for the future based on the success of those so far completed.

The Music Therapy Report for 2009, about the remarkable work of two inspirational music therapists who **Rebuilding Communities** through **MUSIC** funded to visit students at Yea High School for a whole day each week of last term, will hopefully encourage you and your organisation to continue helping us raise funds for these most worthwhile and successful projects.

Of course there are other ways to help these communities to heal and rebuild as Phil Melgaard reports in his article “Rebuilding with the

Performing Arts”. “A Song about Sam” is a lovely article that Gaye Murphy was inspired to write when she heard about our work supporting these communities through music. The link to the song is <http://sites.google.com/site/thesamsong/> if you'd like to hear it.

So when you begin your planning for next year please include some fundraising for our very worthy cause.

All the best for the festive season and associated holidays,

Deborah

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### Next Newsletter's Focus:

**Don't forget us in 2010!**

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## Music Therapy Report 2009

The music therapy program at Yea High School ran for Term 3 of 2009. The groups were facilitated by registered music therapists Kate Teggelove and Dr Katrina McFerran, both of whom have many years of experience working with young people in community based groups. Over the 10 weeks, three groups of teenagers participated in music making. They wrote songs, they improvised on instruments, they sang, they listened and sometimes they even drew pictures or selected photographic cards that showed how they were feeling. Each group approached music therapy differently and this reflected different approaches to coping with trauma. The Year 7 – 9 girls talked openly about their responses to the fires from the beginning, gradually turning their conversations into songs. The Year 7 – 9 boys rarely talked about the fires directly, but they showed a great deal of respect and understanding to those who were known to have been most deeply affected, and they played their feelings on the instruments – angry, sad, frustrated, and happy. The older teenagers moved slowly, waiting to see if they trusted the group process. Ultimately though, it was these young people that most clearly and diversely described their losses and the adjustments they had to make in response to what had happened. The CD that was recorded of the songs and music composed by the three groups is a testament to the quality of their commitment to expressing themselves through music.

When we interviewed the young people after the group had finished, they noted some key areas that stood out to them in response to the music therapy program. All of them began by saying it was ‘fun’, ‘awesome’ or ‘chillax’ (chilled and relaxing). Many of them were amazed by what they had achieved in the group, commenting that they felt more confident because they had done things and expressed things that they didn’t realize were possible. They had gone beyond their comfort zones, and in doing so, they had found resources within themselves that they were not aware of. Some of the younger teenagers described being much less worried about what other people thought as a result of being in the group and one Year 7 girl said that “at the start of the year I was really impacted by other people’s opinions of me, and now I don’t give a rats!”. Another important outcome was the opportunity to express themselves – to take the private into the public

by expressing their emotions, through writing lyrics, playing and singing songs and by playing instruments. This led to a deep sense of connection and community within the group and friendships were deepened, and new connections made. One Year 8 girl said “it’s good to talk to people you trust ... and get it out, you know”. The process of the first five weeks of therapy was crucial in establishing this community. It was at this point that the young people decided that they wanted to make a CD of their songs and the groups then became more focused and disciplined! The young people liked being a part of something, and not just doing work in isolation. One Year 9 boy said “I really liked playing the songs together. Everyone was doing it together and when you got it right, that was just great”. The balance of creativity and acceptance was crucial to the success of this program. Being able to express who you are and have that be accepted is an important experience for a teenager grappling in the wake of the Black Saturday Fires. As a Year 7 boy said: “It was just awesome that everyone was doing what they wanted. I liked it and I didn’t care if they sounded good or not”. That’s it. That’s music therapy.

Kate Teggelove RMT  
[kteggelove@playgroupqld.com.au](mailto:kteggelove@playgroupqld.com.au)

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## Resound Update

Resound recently has delivered pianos and guitars- thank you to ABC Piano Removalists for their time and service. The response from recipients has been touching and reinforces just how much music can help. To quote one recipient: “Thankyou so much for organising to replace some of the instruments that were destroyed with our home in Kinglake on Feb 7. We lived at the top of the mountain in Grandview Crescent & were away from home the day of the fires. Music is such an elixer, a comfort, a release & one of our favourite things. I also use music as a multisensory modality in my work as a paediatric occupational therapist . I'd like to also thank Tony from Emerald [Resound volunteer courier] ...I'm very grateful for the work that you do & for the instruments we've received...”

**Resound** continues to receive applications for instruments and the next round of instruments will go out by end of November in time for Christmas. After this, the next delivery will not take place until late January/early February depending on response of applications and donors.

**Importantly, applications to replace instruments will close 7th February 2010.**

Resound will continue to work to these applications and find replacement instruments post-February 2010.

If you know of anyone who can donate the following instruments, we'd love to hear from them (especially if they live in Victoria):

- Flugel Horn
- Drumkits
- Keyboards
- Guitars of any type
- Flute
- Cornet
- African drums

Thank you for your continued support.

Rachel Hocking

[rhocking@mca.org.au](mailto:rhocking@mca.org.au)

[www.mca.org.au/resoundbushfireappeal](http://www.mca.org.au/resoundbushfireappeal)

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## **A Song About Sam**

Earlier in the year, when many Victorians were experiencing the worst fires ever recorded in Australian history, I like many others, felt quite helpless and vulnerable to what was happening around me. I am a performing arts teacher working in a school located at the base of Mount Dandenong. Every day, driving up to school I would listen to the latest reports that were being updated every fifteen minutes about where the fires were now and whether residents would evacuate or stay. On 'Black Saturday' I personally knew two very close friends who lost their homes and family who were left in their home in Kinglake fighting the flames with their young children. There seemed to be no end to these terrible fires and the level of devastation that they were spreading. Was there light at the end of the tunnel? Day after day, night after night the images of destruction and pain were never ending.

And then there was Sam. 'Sam' was a female koala that was found by a local CFA fireman, David Tree. The fireman's mate took the now famous photograph of David Tree giving Sam a much needed drink. She was badly burned and very distressed. David has been an animal lover for many years and clearly his heart went out to this helpless victim of the fires who just needed a friend. The photograph was picked up by the media and on the cover of newspapers around the world.

When I saw the image of 'Sam' it showed me that whilst there were many victims of the fire like 'Sam', there were also many ordinary Australians, like David, who rallied together to lend a hand. I felt it was important to get this message across to the students that I teach. I wanted to remind them that if we live in a community, we have an obligation to do our best to support that community and Australia is our community. As an Australian, I was very moved by the donation of money, clothing, food and accommodation that was pouring into these families left with nothing after the fires. Many Australian singers and bands donated their time to raise funds by playing at concerts around the nation.

I wrote the song 'Sam the Koala' with my mother and based it on the events of the fires. I wrote it from the perspective of the koala and the fireman who saved her. The last chorus of the song tells us that as young Australians, and together we will carry on despite fire, or flood because we share a bond that we are 'one family, a community of friends, and are Australian's to the end'.

Our school choir sang this song in the Wakakirri Story-singing competition which is a national schools competition encouraging primary students to tell their own story through song. The children sang it brilliantly and are now the Victorian State Winners. I can tell that they really take pride in singing this song because they know they are giving something back to the community; music. They are telling their listeners that they understand their pain and not to give up. In singing this song, they lift the spirits of those who are listening giving them hope and making them proud to be Australians.

Gaye Murphy

Billanook Primary School

[gabrielle.murphy@gmail.com](mailto:gabrielle.murphy@gmail.com)

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## Rebuilding with the Performing Arts

For the past few years I have been entertaining with circus and music at Marysville's Wirreanda Festival each February. In 2007 I also visited Marysville Primary School to present marimba and circus skills workshops. This year I was rung a week before the Festival by an apologetic organiser to cancel the booking as the Festival would not be going ahead due to the town being burnt out in the devastating fires a week earlier on Feb 7th. She also apologized for not contacting me earlier, explaining the phone lines had only just been restored. With all they had just been through, I was touched by the extraordinary understanding and consideration that was being shown to others.

Like people around the country I wondered what I could do that might be of some help and so I offered the Marysville School three days of what I do in schools and festivals around the State as a musician and entertainer - namely circus skills with magic and music as well. Marysville Primary School's principal leapt at the offer and I visited the school a week later.

The twenty something kids at Marysville had been relocated 18 kms up the road to join the handful of students at Taggart Primary School. Walking through the gate I saw ahead of me two huge army guys walking in holding the hands of a tiny grade one girl between them – support was at hand. With Marysville sealed off as a crime scene the Australian Army was providing all sorts of logistical support including getting kids to school.

We began with a song and a dance followed by some magic and circus with the kids trying their hand at plate spinning and juggling then stilt walking on the oval at lunch time. At the end of the day was the official opening of their new Marysville Primary School classroom and office at Taggart and so the kids of both schools performed their newly acquired circus skills in a brief but stunning performance for their parents. Children sang and danced with their parents (or someone else's parents) before the evening ended with a community BBQ. As the principal of Marysville Primary School said in closing, 'it's good to see the children smiling again'.

So three days became four by the end of June and these wonderful kids were making such progress it didn't seem the right time to pull out just as some of the temporary relief measures were also finishing up. The performing arts generally, and music in particular, offer unique opportunities for creative expression that could be of some help in recovery. Singing, dancing and playing music affording opportunities for emotional expression; stilt walking gives kids a new perspective on the world and juggling offers a metaphor for coping with more than we thought we could.

Arrangements were made for me to come back a few more times and finish up with a performance in December for the community celebrating the new skills the kids had learned throughout the year. Also, truth be told, it is a source of continuing satisfying for me watching these children grow in skill and confidence. It seemed to me these kids were like the 'green shoots' on the burnt out trees that were appearing at the time - some first tentative signs of things coming back to life - life returning in some ways to normal.



These days are always very busy with an all-in singing and dance session to start with (the kids always requesting their favourite songs from previous visits) followed by some new songs and a dance. Then separate junior and senior sessions with circus or marimbas before another all-in to close the day.

As a performer with a background in music teaching it is hard not to slip in some informal music teaching set in the context of having fun with the performing arts. So singing focuses on developing the head voice, pitch and confidence with songs in different styles; playing catchy marimba tunes focuses on aural awareness and dancing focuses on beat and rhythm skills. As many educationalists already know, teaching the performing arts is a highly effective way to develop the life skills confidence, persistence, organization and social skills simultaneously.

With assistance from **Rebuilding Communities** through **MUSIC** some children from Marysville, accompanied by their Principal, were able to attend this year's Marimba Camp at nearby Healesville in July. This camp is conducted annually by the Victorian Orff Schulwerk Association and over the course of the weekend participants this year made a brand new marimba that was presented to Marysville Primary School to replace one of the ones they lost in the February fires. The children experienced the infectious nature of marimba music that has continued back at school with their Music Teacher Di Gaylard.

On some visits I've been accompanied by performing friends of mine, Joseph Bromley and Andy Rigby, who have brought their own flair and expertise adding extra songs and catchy marimba tunes to the mix.

In addition to Marysville and Taggart I have also visited other fire affected schools at Buxton and Highlands. The children in all of these schools I have found to be very responsive, appreciative and a delight to work with.

It is an absolute privilege to visit these schools and to share music making and other performing arts with these remarkable kids. My thanks to **Rebuilding Communities** through **MUSIC** and the efforts of Deborah Smith and Glenys Gijbers for supporting this work and assisting these visits to continue.

Phil Melgaard

*Phil Melgaard is a musician, entertainer and workshop presenter at festivals, schools and community events throughout Victoria. He has been a Performing Arts specialist teacher and a freelance workshop presenter.*

[philmelgaard@gmail.com](mailto:philmelgaard@gmail.com)

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## **The Boite Schools' Chorus 2009**

**Congratulations!!!** ...to the teachers, schools, parents and all the fantastic singers who took part in the 2009 Boite Schools Chorus-Our Home Our Land!

Thanks also to **Rebuilding Communities** through **MUSIC** who donated funds towards this wonderful event, paying for buses to be available for students attending from the fire affected schools.

We have received wonderful feedback from participants and audience members and many lovely, colourful thank you cards, posters and letters from students. Thanks for filling our office with so much colour!

Here's what this year's participants had to say about Our Home Our Land.

The students said: *'I just absolutely love it'  
'It's really fun and you get to learn new songs'  
'I like watching all the smiles in the audience'  
'I learnt how to sing a song in Aboriginal'*

And from a teacher: *'This is my first experience singing with a choir with the chorus it's been a great experience and I hope it's the first of many experiences'*.

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## **Rebuilding Communities through Music**

PO BOX 610 Heidelberg VIC 3084

Contact Details for this appeal:

Deborah Smith Ph 0421 825 302

Email: [deborahsmith@aapt.net.au](mailto:deborahsmith@aapt.net.au)

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