

New Directions For Moss Vale Music Festival

Introduction:

Late in 2004, FestNet received funding through Arts Victoria's Local Festivals program to undertake an innovative project aimed at strengthening regional festivals' capacity to deliver exciting arts programming. Called *Directions*, the project comprised six regional festivals being mentored by three experienced artistic directors familiar with working in regional Victoria. The project will culminate in the *New Directions Regional Festivals Forum to be held* in conjunction with Castlemaine State Festival on Sunday 3rd April. – see FestNet News to find out more and register!

The mentors (Caroline Stacey, Artistic Director for Castlemaine State Festival, Santha Press, artist and former Director of Winterfest in Warburton and Jason Cross, co-Director of Big West Festival), assisted each festival committee in developing their unique artistic vision and how this related to their available resources and communities.

Through interviews with participants, Deakin University's Bowater School of Management and Marketing documented the process, creating individual case studies of each festival, such as the following case study of Moss Vale Music Festival, mentored by Santha Press. The case studies will be profiled through the FestNet newsletter over the next couple of months and permanently available on the Resources page as they are published.

Moss Vale Music Festival Case Study By Ruth Rentschler and Anne-Marie Hede, Deakin University

Moss Vale Music Festival is a 'world music festival'. The festival, in its fourth year, is held in the historic Moss Vale Park, South Gippsland, in March. The organisers, a co-operative of three volunteer arts organisations have been successful in attracting well-known musicians to perform at the one-day

festival. For example, in 2005 Ritchie Havens, who opened the first Woodstock concert, will perform at the festival.

The mentoring process involved the committee examining, with their mentor, what it was that they wanted to achieve with regard to the festival's artistic direction. One of the issues that the mentor identified for the Moss Vale Music Festival was that there was a need to set aside time to think in a strategic manner about artistic direction, as well as festival management in general. Like most festival organisers, the organisers of the Moss Vale Music Festival are occupied with the logistics of staging this year's festival and do not often have the time to develop long-term plans and strategies to realise these plans. The process assisted Moss Vale Music Festival's volunteer organising to develop 'a strategy that is going to work over time — something for now and something for the future'. Furthermore, the process assisted the organising committee to clarify that whilst they wanted to retain the 'world music' image that the festival had developed, they saw the need to more actively engage with the local community than what they had done in the past. The committee felt that this could be achieved by developing the festival's artistic direction and program, but were unclear as to how could this be realistically achieved.

Very early in the mentoring process, Moss Vale's mentor identified that festival was already generating strong creative ideas from the local community and that it was important to harness these in the most effective way. This was not just about artistic direction, however. It was about developing relationships and partnerships with the diverse range of stakeholders of the festival in the local community. For example, relationships were strengthened with the local farmers in the Moss Vale region. In 2004, hay bales were used to buffer the sound of a very noisy generator. In 2005, hay bales were used as part of an art installation and emerged as a symbol of the Moss Vale region: the plight of the local farmers in recent years and a celebration of the harvests that the farmers were experiencing after years of

drought. In 2004, hay bales served a utilitarian function. In 2005, hay bales represent strengths within the Moss Vale community. Participation in the mentoring program was instrumental in identifying and accentuating the connection between the festival and the local community with the use of this novel and symbolic artistic installation.

Each year, some of Moss Vale's youth volunteer as 'roadies' for the musicians who perform at the festival. The organisers of the festival value the youth participation as most are musicians themselves and handle the instruments and equipment appropriately. After the Moss Vale Music Festival, the youth stages its own music festival on the Sunday. The two programs are separate to, but through the mentoring process, the organisers of the festival now recognise that the link between the two programs should be accentuated. In his way, the Moss Vale Music Festival can more formally acknowledge the contribution of youth and enhance both programs.

In 2006, the opening of the Commonwealth Games will coincide with the Moss Vale Music Festival. As a direct result of the mentoring program, the committee has already approached the local shire about how they can work together to harness opportunities arising from this international event. Moss Vale Music Festival's world music image will become a feature of the shire's Commonwealth Games event strategy. The organisers are also planning to work much more closely with Moss Vale's Indigenous community to ensure that it is represented in the Festival program in 2006.

For the future, the committee believes that it now has the confidence to make decisions with regard to the festival's artistic direction. As a result of their participation in *Directions*, organisers of the Moss Vale Music Festival '...feel more secure that we don't have to get huge amounts of money, that if we are thinking long term we can do something that aids the [festival and wider community's longer term] artistic development as well as the specific things for that year'. Furthermore, participation in *Directions* provided the committee

members with opportunities to develop networks with other festivals in regional Victoria. Now they realise that other festival organisers around Victoria are experiencing similar difficulties with regard to festival management and that solutions can be made by networking with each other.

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