

community *voice*

How to go about it

Stephen Costello has challenged *Music Alive* readers to contribute to the drafting of a community music development policy (*Music Forum* 6/6, August 2000). As community music workers we have a responsibility for best practice, especially to use our limited resources in the most effective way at a local, regional and national level.

However I believe that to form a framework that will encompass all of the diverse and colourful music making in communities across Australia we need to start from a broader base. Stephen states that "the primary focus of community music activity is the effect of our music making on the people in our communities and on the strength of our communities." The effect of community music making is both inspirational and powerful, and may be harnessed for great good.

However an effective development framework needs to include all community musicians. Music making for the joy of it, while contributing to the cultural and social life of the community, is often created with only musical goals in mind. The music that springs from communities as part of their working life is as important as that which is planned and structured for a positive social impact.

I echo Susan Faine's question.. "Can community music development spring from within, without a structured program?"

An effective development framework will include both these forms of community music making. I believe that it will have at its heart a commitment to music for everyone, regardless of economic situation, race, age, gender, disability or ideology. This is the fight that I believe we have

the responsibility to contribute our energy to, and the starting point for an inclusive and flexible community music development policy.

Stephen's suggestions for draft policy are an excellent beginning. They bring into focus the question of how a policy, once formed, could be implemented at a national level. Most often community artists are so necessarily embroiled in the day to day survival and successes of their local projects, that it is difficult to see beyond. Magazines such as *Community Music Australia's Music Alive* contribute to the development of a truly national network. *Community Music Victoria* is an excellent example of a statewide arts body that keeps Victorians informed of the state of affairs statewide, providing a picture of Victorian community music development. *Community Music Australia* has begun the work, but we have come to a point where we need to clarify our future.

We cannot simply superimpose a national organisation over the extremely diverse and colourful group of things that fall under label of community music. Stephen's second draft policy point "that community music development projects should be built on a solid understanding of the position and preparedness of the community and be respectful of local protocols" is a most important guideline. Developing a national body is a community music development project on an enormous scale, especially with limited resources and enormous geographical barriers. This project requires a long term bottom up approach.

• **Developing a solid understanding** A solid understanding of the Australian community mu-

sic community cannot be gained from the heights of a national body, unless that national body is informed by statewide and large regional bodies. The development of bodies such as *Community Music Victoria* is a prerequisite to the development of a national body with anything near a solid understanding of the national community music picture.

• **Preparedness of the community** As artists on a local level our energies are almost all focused on the day to day difficulties of local projects. The community of artists must see the need for a global view. They require more resources (sound familiar) and to be inspired to be prepared to look beyond.

• **Be respectful of local protocols** Any overseeing body, statewide or nationally, must have the framework to accept all forms of community music making, be they conscious of social impact or making music for "fun", and exclude no group that sees themselves as part of the community music movement.

Community Music Australia has the potential to be a powerful information, networking and lobbying body. I believe its development requires a long term bottom up approach through the formation of regional and state networks, an inclusive framework, and artists with the time and energy to contribute to state, regional and national development.

CMA is to be commended for the work to this point. We have limited resources. Do we put our energy, time and persistence into building CMA from the grass roots into a powerful organisation backed with national energy? We need a united approach that will include all of those with a commitment to community music making in Australia. Please contribute to the dialogue so we can ensure the future of a vibrant and rich Australian community music life.

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