



Introduction

2013 marked the 150th anniversary of the arrival of South Sea Islanders as indentured labourers in Queensland and other parts of Australia. To commemorate this important historical event the ASSI 150 SEQ project was initiated in 2010 between Local Governments of SEQLD, representatives of Australian South Sea Islander (ASSI) communities, Queensland Museums and Museum and Gallery Services Queensland and other interested community. ASSI 150 SEQ was a collaborative project to ensure that appropriate commemoration was made of this anniversary and a SEQ committee was formed to guide the various projects. Commemorations and events were held from July 2013. This collaboration saw a number of outcomes delivered across the Local government areas of SEQLD. Each local area directed and developed their own projects in partnership with their communities and with the resources available to them.

Collectively, representatives met to discuss the objectives, ultimately applying successfully for funding from Multicultural Affairs Queensland for a coordinator position to manage communication, development of a website and a combined exhibition at the State Library of Queensland.

This case study centres on one of the projects from this collaboration within the geographical area of the Scenic Rim Council. This is Our Story was a community commemoration held in August 2013 on the site of the original cotton plantation outside of Beaudesert where the first indentured labourers were brought into Queensland. It was a direct result of research and development undertaken as part of the ASSI 150 SEQ project. This is Our Story responded to needs identified in the community and tackled issues of how to appropriately mark this occasion. It provided opportunities for stakeholders with different individual and group connections to this history to come together to exchange personal experiences and to develop cultural protocols for appropriate interaction. It also resulted in a wave of support and goodwill from local community, in particular the Mununjali Traditional Owners, descendants of the original plantation owners and current landowners, to embrace Australian South Sea Islanders and to go on a journey of discovery and friendship.



This is Our Story – What and Why?

This is Our Story brought together local Australian South Sea Islanders, Mununjali Traditional Owners, descendants of plantation owners, members of Harvest Point Christian Outreach Church, current landowners and the larger Beaudesert community to create a respectful commemoration ceremony to remember the coming of the first South Sea Islanders to the district as indentured labourers in 1863. Key stakeholders recognised that there was only limited awareness of this history and the significance of the event among local community. The project aimed to change that.

This is Our Story tried to respond to the following **questions**:

- How does a community mark and commemorate its difficult histories and engage current community members with this history?
- How does a community come to honour and celebrate our history and learn from it?
- How does a community go forward in grace together acknowledging the painful past while working with different cultures and unfamiliar protocols?
- What legacy can be left behind from such a process and where is the journey going to lead?

The project achieved the following **objectives**:

- Acknowledgment of the ASSI people and promotion of their unique culture and valuable contribution in the development of Queensland.
- Increased awareness and recognition of Australian South Sea Islanders and their significance to Australia's past, present and future.
- An increased engagement by local community with an important part of local history in Scenic Rim Regional Council. This is a significant Scenic Rim Story. A significant Queensland story. A significant Australian story.
- Contribution to dialogue at a regional level in SEQ to engage with some of the challenging historical issues and bringing diverse communities together in an appropriate way.

This is Our Story received **funding** through the Scenic Rim Regional Arts Development Fund over two rounds:

- The first grant funded appointment of Peace and Conflict Studies Institute Australia (PaCSIA) and an event coordinator to determine an appropriate methodology for a community commemoration documented in a report.
- The second round of funding was used to implement outcomes from the report and for coordination of the event and other associated event costs.

How?



As part of the first funding PaCSIA was contracted to design and facilitate a community consultation and public dialogue process with relevant stakeholders and to assist the planning committee.



The **consultation and dialogue events** were held in Beaudesert at The Centre and at St Thomas' Anglican Church in the form of restorative circles and Community Café Dialogues. Parallel to the dialogue and consultation events the planning committee ran 10 logistics meetings to plan the event as well as on-site inspections of the Harvest Point Church to organise the plan for the day. In order to educate the young people of the district on this important period of history, the committee visited local schools to run history and art classes to engage the students with the ASSI connection to the Beaudesert region. The students participated in story-telling activities as well as making art about their own story. Presentations were also given to the members of Beaudesert Rotary Club and the Scenic Rim Regional Council Leadership Group.



Creative activation was woven through the ASSI 150 SEQ project and This is Our Story. Outcomes from the ASSI 150 SEQ project included exhibitions at the State Library of Queensland, workshops and displays at the Queensland Museum, talks, film screenings and events at GOMA and the South Bank Cultural precinct. Exhibitors included ASSI artists from across Queensland, artists from the Pacific and from interstate. These artists also exhibited at Logan Art Gallery and the Centre, Beaudesert. Artworks reflected notions of loss, identity, place and belonging. The Echoes exhibition at the Centre, Beaudesert followed the themes of Island Life, the Journey, Life on Plantation, The Return, Recognition and Contribution.



The processes that built relationships and conversations that underpinned This is Our Story were critical to establishing protocols and connections between South Sea Islanders in the Pacific, Australian South Sea Islander groups across Queensland and First Nation traditional owners in South East Queensland which enabled a successful and culturally appropriate launch of the ASSI 150 SEQ at the Southbank Cultural Precinct.

Creative outcomes from this sensitive approach to cultural protocols within the This is Our Story Project included:

- Collaborative design of teacher education kits and arts activities for primary schools (launched at the Woodhill Primary School, site of the first school in Townsville) linked to the Echoes exhibition at the Centre, Beaudesert.
- Contemporary Fijian illustration workshop facilitated by Abraham Langi as part of Echoes exhibition.
- Blackbird Exchange Project - a children's art activity and school exchange between Wood Hill State School and schools in Vanuatu.
- Echoes exhibition opening featuring Mununjali smoking ceremony, traditional Vanuatu welcome as a lead up to This is Our Story community event the following morning. The exhibition provided an artistic and historical reflection of the stories behind the first arrivals of South Sea Islanders as indentured labourers in Queensland. It also provided opportunities for Chiefs, elders, artists, community and landowners to meet and more fully understand the story prior to the community commemoration event.

- Choirs from Beaudesert, Tamborine Mountain and the Gold Coast workshopped a tribute song to the Australian South Sea Islanders and learnt the song penned by Keith Willie “This is my Story“ to perform at the community event.



The community commemoration day on the 24 August



2013 included the following main activities:

Commemorative walk along Walker Road into the grounds of the church. The walk reflected the original walk of the Islanders as they made their way onto the plantation land 150 years earlier. However this time the ASSI people and dignitaries from Vanuatu walked together as equals with the descendants of the original landowners and were welcomed onto their land by the Traditional Custodians of the Land, the Mununjali People.



Speeches and gift giving ceremony between dignitaries to mark a reconciliation between the different groups – Paramount Chief Richard Fandanumata from Vanuatu, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Premier Queensland The Hon Glen Elmes, Mayor Scenic Rim Regional Council John Brent, Federal Member for Wright Scott Bucholtz, State Member for Beaudesert John Krause, President of the Mununjali Elders Council Uncle Kevin Page, Vice-president of the Mununjali Elders Council Aunty Margaret Lawton, ASSI Elder Aunty Jenny Shepherd, President of the Vanuatu Australian South Sea Islander Community (VASSIC) Kakae Pakoa, Secretary of VASSIC Natalie Pakoa, representing the Walker Family Janet Bodman and other distinguished guests and elders.



Performance of the song *This is Our Story* by Keith Willie by a combined community choir, an original song written for the project and workshop conducted by Rachel Hore. Performances by string bands, Aboriginal and Pacific Islander traditional dance, folk bands, performance of traditional Melanesian Farewell.



Community Participation through art workshops, traditional picnic games, cultural markets and food stalls. The exhibitions curator and cultural services staff from SRRC held workshops at This is Our Story as an extension program of the Echoes exhibition. These included *Lets journey together* (paper boats) and the *Blackbird Exchange Project* and *39 Moon Lantern Making* (reflecting on the 39 moons labourers marked their time at Townsvale).



BADCAP held workshops to discuss the **Artist in Residence** project which would become an ASSI *Wayfinder* sculpture on the plantation site. They also created a mould from the impressions of hands of the visiting Supreme Chief from Vanuatu and the President of the Mununjali Elders Group and a descendant of the original plantation owner. This will become a plaque that commemorates the reconciliation forged through this process and project and a tangible reminder of the healing process that has taken place.

Documentation - A video commemorating the event was created as part of the RADF application and local filmmaker Elijah Cavanagh presented the finished version to the planning committee.



The video is available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMFUI5hkUvY>.

Reflection - As part of the SRRCs Arts Dinners following the community commemoration the August arts dinner was a celebration and debrief of the This is Our Story Project.



Who was involved?



Planning committee (in alphabetical order):
Lesley Bryant: Patron.
Bronwyn Davies: Coordinator of Cultural Services Scenic Rim Regional Council.
Auntie Lorraine Iselin: Mununjali Elder.
Auntie Margaret Lawton: Mununjali Elder.
Brad Lewis (PaCSIA): Facilitator.
Serge Loode (PaCSIA): Project Leader.
Nancy Moss: Event Co-ordinator.
Mark Paddick (SRRRC): RADF and Heritage Officer.



Kakae Pakoa: President of VASSIC (Vanuatu Australian South Sea Islander Community).
Natalie Pakoa: Secretary of VASSIC.
Ailsa Rolley: RADF Applicant from Beaudesert Historical Society.



Assisted by:
Harvest Point Christian Outreach Church.
John Waldron: Coordinator of ASSI 150 SEQ.
Imelda Miller: Assistant Curator, Torres Strait Islander and Pacific Indigenous Studies.
BADCAP (Beaudesert and District Community Arts Project).
Deborah Beattie: Museums and Gallery Services.
Mununjali Elders Group.
The Yugambeh Museum.
Janet Bodman, Bill and Helen Walker (descendants of original plantation owner William T. Walker) and other members of the Walker Family.
Rick Hotz and other landowners.
Kevin Raines: Heritage Team Leader City of Gold Coast.
Tanya Jen: Heritage Ipswich City.
ASSI and local community groups.

Where & When?

Initial meetings occurred from October 2010 with the first being held at the Tweed Regional Gallery NNSW. Consequently subcommittees were formed to advance the following areas:

- Local government collaboration;
- Research;
- Community consultation;
- International communication.

By the end of 2012 local government planning was underway but issues of protocol and appropriate engagement with key stakeholders was still unresolved. Through the This is Our Story process and the work with PaCSIA, significant consultation began in January 2013 to work with Australian South Sea Islander groups and Traditional Owner representatives and elders. At the same time engagement with local landowners and the descendants of the original plantation owners commenced.

Key Program Stages

- 2010: Ailsa Rolley publishes 39 Moons at Townsville Cotton Plantation 1862-1873.
- 23rd October 2010: First meeting for South Sea Islander Project held at Tweed River Gallery Murwillumbah.
- 12th November 2010: First meeting of Local Government working group including Deputy Mayor Cr Dave Cockburn, Bronwyn Davies SRRC, Kevin Rains GCCC, Helen Pithie Queensland Museum Development Officer at the Centre, Beaudesert.
- 4th December 2010: First meeting of Research Working party at GCCC Nerang administration building. Includes Imelda Miller (Queensland Museum), Krishna Nahow (ASSI artist) Lesley Jenkins (GCCC), Helen Pithie Queensland MDO, Sue Pearson, Ailsa Rolley, Lesley Bryant, Dr Kevin Rains (GCCC).
- 16th April 2011: ASSI 150 meeting held at Beaudesert with representatives from ASSI community, Scenic Rim Regional Council, Gold Coast City Council, and Queensland Museum.
- June 2011: International call for Artists to participate in Exhibition at the Centre, Beaudesert and first newsletter distributed outlining the project and ways to get involved.
- December 2011: Second newsletter distributed with contributions from Emelda Davis, Sue Pearson, Tanya Jen, Mary Christian-Bailey, Sonia Minniecon-Smith, Ailsa Rolley, Kevin Rains.
- February 2012: Funding of \$20,000 received from Dept of Multicultural Affairs Queensland towards employment of a coordinator for the ASSI 150 Project.
- July 2012: John Waldron appointed as ASSI 150 SEQ Project Coordinator.
- September 2012: Ailsa Rolley submits her application to the Scenic Rim Regional Council for a Concept Development Grant through its RADF program. She received \$10,670 to employ a facilitator and event co-ordinator to work with the community members and ASSI stakeholders to create an event plan for a community commemoration.
- January 2013: PaCSIA comes on board for the ASSI 150 Community Consultation and Facilitation meetings held with Mununjali Elders.
- PaCSIA contacts all relevant stakeholders and organises a series of community consultation and dialogue events which bring together various families of Australian South Sea Islanders, Mununjali People, members of the Walker Family who trace their line to the original plantation owners and other community.
- 20 February 2013: Meeting with the Walker Family.
- 14 March 2013: Information session for Current landowners in Beaudesert.
- 16 March 2013: Logan Protocol meeting with Mununjali Traditional Owners and VASSIC.

- March 2013: Ailsa Rolley submits her application to the Scenic Rim Regional Council for a Building Community Cultural Capacity Grant through the RADF program. She received \$13,750 to plan and produce a community arts and culture event to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the ASSI arrival in Queensland.
- April 2013: PaCSIA present their project report and recommendations.
- May to July 2013: Further consultations and Community Café Dialogue events take place.
- 16 June 2013: Weaving the Way protocol meeting with several ASSI community groups.
- 27 July 2013: This is Our Story Community Café St Thomas Church in Beaudesert.
- 23 August 2013: Echoes Exhibition opens at The Centre in Beaudesert.
- 24th August 2013: This is Our Story ASSI 150 Commemorative event at Harvest Point Christian Outreach Church, Veresdale.
- 27th August 2013: ASSI 150 Arts Dinner held at The Centre in Beaudesert.
- November 2013: ASSI Artist in Residence Kakae Pakoa commences public art work at Everdell Park Gleneagle with Beaudesert and District Community Arts Project Inc (BADCAP) funded by Scenic Rim Regional Council and RADF.
- 6th December 2013: DATSIMA holds inaugural meeting of Scenic Rim Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Network at The Centre in Beaudesert.

Underlying Principles and Values

The planning committee and the PaCSIA facilitators identified the following principles and values as paramount for ensuring respectful exchanges and a community-owned commemoration event.

- A belief that communities themselves know what is best for them and can make meaningful decisions. It is the role of facilitators to support this decision-making process.
- Creating ownership of project ideas through early invitation of stakeholders in the idea generation and planning process.
- Inviting people to participate and documenting their ideas, knowledge and decision. These decisions shaped the further consultation project and the commemoration event itself.
- Holding ideas of facilitators and organizing staff lightly and being willing to change or abandon processes and ideas that do not seem to work.
- Facilitators asked permission from participants and discussed the facilitation method with participants. Facilitators acknowledged from the outset that they were willing to be guided by the participants with regards to cultural considerations.
- Recognition that the project did something new and that there was little previous knowledge to be drawn upon.
- Creation of a respectful forum for dialogue and reflection for this new knowledge to be created.
- Constant reflection on the process and adaptation of the method.
- Respect that the process and the event had different meanings for different stakeholders and that it was the task of the facilitators to create a space for these different meanings to be discussed.

Dialogue and Consultation Process

PaCSIA started the consultation process through individual meetings with representatives from the different stakeholder groups. In these meetings it was explored what a respectful consultation process would look like and who would need to be invited. Following on from the individual consultations, group meetings were convened where the different stakeholder groups met with each other.

For the group meetings with stakeholders, a restorative practice methodology for constructive engagement was used. Given the diversity of stories and the sensitivities and discomfort that some stakeholders felt before the joint meetings, a restorative practice process was the most appropriate facilitation method. Restorative practice acknowledges and supports story-sharing in an environment guided by the facilitators. It was used to elicit the connections of different stakeholders to the history and locality of the Townsvale Plantation.

The encounters were facilitated through the use of Restorative Circles (similar to Aboriginal Yarning Circles) in which participants sit in a large circle and are given opportunity to speak to everyone else in the circle and to share stories and experiences. The questions asked of participants were developed by the facilitators and the discussion was guided by them. Participants were asked to provide their personal views and feelings about the history of Townsvale and the commemoration event. Out of these exchanges the participants built relationships with each other and decided on principles and goals for a successful commemoration event. A key strength of the approach was that participants gained a better and deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives, experiences and stories of other participants. This helped to overcome misunderstandings and alleviated fears among different stakeholders.

For larger stakeholder meetings, the Community Café Dialogues method was used. Dialogue processes give participants from different cultural backgrounds an opportunity to understand the influence of existing cultures and the differences that distinguish them without letting a particular culture or cultures dominate the discourse. Community Cafés are based on the World Café Conversations facilitation method. They allow for large groups of people to come together in a constructive and energetic environment to discuss questions that matter. Community Cafés also provide an excellent opportunity for participants who do not know each other to come together and to build relationships. Participants share stories and experiences about their own world views, cultural backgrounds and interests. Some community elders associated with the ASSI 150 project had already participated in Community Cafés run by PaCSIA and had found the process very empowering and stimulating. The Community Cafés also provided an opportunity for ASSI families from other parts of Queensland to visit Beaudesert and to share their own stories. This provided unique opportunities for ASSI participants to learn more about their own family connections and identities and to understand better how their ancestors lived and where their current generation comes from.

In Community Café Dialogues participants sit at small tables of four or five people. They share food and the room is decorated like a Café with flowers and colourful tablecloths on the tables. Facilitators pose a question to everyone in the room and participants share their views and answers to the question with each other in their groups. They also record ideas on flipchart paper on the table. After about 30 minutes a round ends and all participants except one or two move to a different table and discuss a different question. The major advantage of this method is that participants speak to as many other people in the room as possible and hear different ideas and views. It also creates an energetic and friendly atmosphere. In some Community Cafés PaCSIA provided table hosts who helped record ideas and reported back at the end of the Café to everyone in attendance.

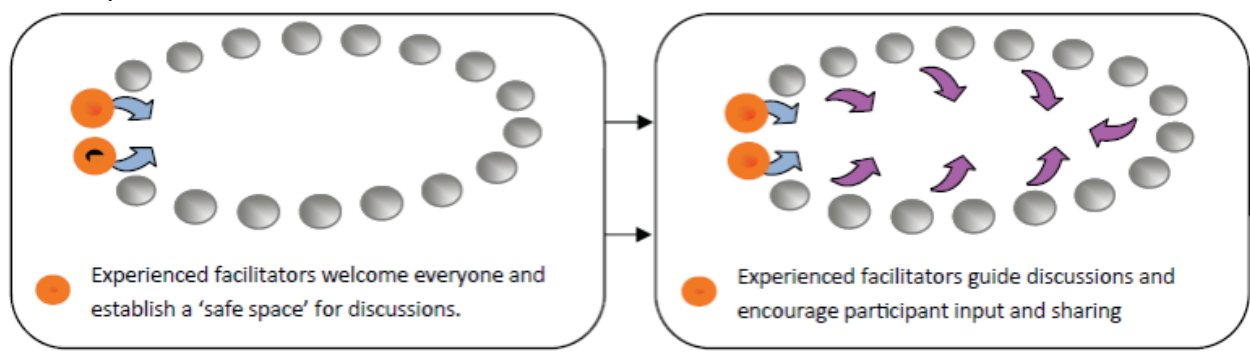
The combination of Restorative Circles and Community Cafés was useful to provide a safe space for stakeholders to meet and to have a meaningful exchange about the past, present and the future commemoration event. Parallel to the consultation and dialogue meetings PaCSIA assisted in the facilitation of the planning committee meetings dealing with the details of the commemoration event. The planning committee was enlarged after the first Restorative Circle and included Mununjali People, VASSIC members and current landowners. The planning committee

also reported back to the Walker Family and the Harvest Point Outreach Church and engaged both groups to voice their views as part of the planning process since representatives were unable to attend the planning meetings. Planning committee members reported back to their community groups and organisations to inform other stakeholders of decisions made and to create ownership from the different groups. Planning committee members also reported to community stakeholders at the Community Café events.

The joint use of these three facilitation processes ensured that the different stakeholder groups felt that they had actual input into the planning and event design process and that their decisions were considered by the planning committee. Stakeholders became active supporters of the project, invited their families, friends and colleagues and enriched the exchange by adding their own knowledge of the old Townsville plantation, the history of South Sea Islanders in the district and the history of Traditional Owners.

Restorative Circle

This is a term for a facilitated process for dialogue whereby participants come together in a circle to share and discuss issues and themes of an important and potentially sensitive nature. Discussions may also relate to incidents and events (including historical events) which have resulted in harm and negative impacts. The restorative circle provides a forum for dialogue where deeper understanding can be gained by all participants. Participants also consider the present and future in terms of what actions and outcomes could remedy previous harms and create improvement for the future. In some restorative circles a speaking order may be established to assist the process.



Generic steps tailored specifically for each event:

1. Planning and consultation phase (prior to event).

The scope, key themes and agenda for the restorative dialogue are developed in consultation with key stakeholders. There is preparatory discussion and consultation with all participants prior to the event. Contingency planning and risk management dimensions are considered.

2. Commencement and introductions (on the day)

Everyone is introduced and the agreed format and themes for the dialogue event are outlined. Any appropriate acknowledgments, cultural protocols, or other important meeting considerations are incorporated in proceedings.

3. Establishing a safe space for restorative dialogue.

Pre-agreed guidelines are discussed with all present. Any 'special needs', hopes and/or expectations around meeting etiquette are discussed with all present. Discussion guidelines/ground rules are confirmed with all present.

4. Restorative discussions.

Experienced 'restorative' facilitators guide a large group discussion as per the agenda. Themes and issues are explored in depth. Participants are encouraged to talk one person at a time into the circle sharing stories, personal reflections, differing perspectives, feelings, responses, and questions. Facilitators, using specialised communication techniques, carefully manage and moderate the session, encouraging respectful and sincere dialogue between participants. Breaks are called as appropriate. An emphasis is placed upon: respectful and sensitive dialogue; deeper listening; learning; encouraging greater understanding and empathy.

5. Closing the circle

At an appropriate time, and in consultation with participants, the facilitators will bring the session to a close. In closing, facilitators may provide a summary of the discussions that have taken place, noting any common understandings and outcomes that have been decided. Participants are thanked for their time and any follow up actions are noted and actioned accordingly.

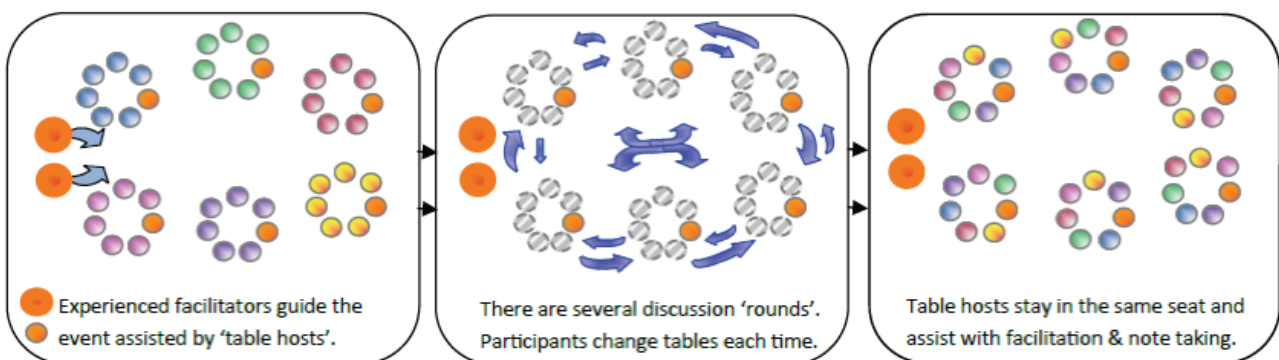
Further reading:

Kraybill, RS & Wright, E 2006, The little book of cool tools for hot topics: group tools to facilitate meetings when things are hot, (The little books of justice and peacebuilding), Good Books, Intercourse.

Umbreit, MS & Peterson Armour, M 2010, Restorative justice dialogue: an essential guide for research and practice, New York, Springer.

World Café Conversations

A method of facilitated dialogue whereby participants are encouraged to discuss issues and key questions in small groups with the assistance of facilitators. The event comprises several rounds of conversation, each focused around a specific question or theme. Participants are encouraged to share their perspectives in the small group context and have a lively discussion with other participants. With each new round participants are encouraged to change tables and form new groups. Table hosts are assigned to each table and assist with facilitation and note taking. World Café Conversations are dynamic and inspired by the lively and energised discussions of a real life café. A convivial atmosphere is promoted and events are routinely complimented by decorative tablecloths, flowers, music, catering and refreshments reminiscent of a café atmosphere.



Generic steps tailored specifically for each event

1. Planning and consultation phase (prior to event).

The scope, key themes and objectives for the event are developed through consultation with key stakeholders. Key considerations relating to event timing, venue selection and event promotion are considered and developed into an event plan. Contingency planning and risk management dimensions are considered. In the lead up to the event, facilitators develop a small set of key

focussing questions which will be used to guide discussions. The questions are developed carefully and strategically, reflecting an understanding that World Café Conversations involve several consecutive 'rounds' of discussion, each 'round' to build upon the previous stage. In practical terms this presents an opportunity for dialogue to be kept focussed and progressed in stages:

e.g. 1) past => 2) present => 3) future; or, 1) issues and problems => 2) options => 3) implementation and action steps.

2. Commencement and introductions (on the day).

Participants are seated in small groups of approx. 4-6 people. Where possible attendees are encouraged to sit with people they may not know well. At the formal opening lead facilitators will introduce themselves and provide an overview of the event. Any appropriate acknowledgments and meeting protocols are incorporated in proceedings. Participants at each table are then encouraged to introduce themselves to others at the same table and meet their 'table host'.

3. Establishing a safe space.

Pre-agreed guidelines are discussed with all present. Any 'special needs', hopes and/or expectations around meeting etiquette are discussed as a group. Discussion guidelines/ground rules are confirmed with all present.

4. World Café Dialogue.

Discussions will occur in 'rounds', most commonly 2-3 rounds per event. Lead facilitators will clarify the focus question for each round. 'Table hosts' are nominated for each table and stay with the same table throughout the event. Their role is to assist with facilitation at the smaller tables and to record quality notes from the discussions. The table hosts may be part of the facilitation and planning team or could be volunteer participants on the day.

Lead facilitators manage the time for each round. When the time is up participants (except the table hosts) are urged to stretch their legs and move to a new table whereby a new group is formed. A new focus question is provided and the next 'round' of discussions commences.

5. Concluding the event

In conclusion of the event, table hosts and lead facilitators read back the notes to all participants as a larger group. There may be further discussion as appropriate and notes may be distributed to participants (e.g. via email etc.). Participants are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility for any outcomes and follow up actions. Participants are thanked for their time.

Further reading:

Brown, J, Isaacs, D & The World Café Community, 2005, The World Café handbook: shaping our futures through conversations that matter, Berrett-Koeler Publishers Inc., San Francisco.

Outcomes

- The steering committee and the key stakeholders were all united with a single goal of a harmonious and fitting tribute to the South Sea Islanders. Their contribution to the life and development of the Beaudesert region was acknowledged and the event confirmed this chapter in Scenic Rim and Australian History.
- The community event was symbolic of the healing which united a wide cross-section of the local community and gave a greater understanding of the importance the ASSI played in the histories of the region. These stories are of national significance and now part of our collective community heritage and will provide a source of education for future generations.

- The event recognised the first South Sea Islanders who were used in a systematic scale of indentured labour in Queensland.
- During the event, invited artists delivered performances and engaged the community through workshops and music which provided the community with a deeper understanding of the arts across a diverse range of cultures and histories.
- The event nurtured a strong sense of community spirit through community cultural development by supporting arts projects that encouraged inclusion, caring and friendly communities, mateship, and pride and community cohesion. The event's strong focus on telling stories from different perspectives with the single outcome of community harmony has strengthened connections between the ASSI, the Indigenous community and the wider Beaudesert and district communities.
- The event provided an important opportunity to acknowledge and commemorate the substantial contributions made by the South Sea Islanders to the early economic development of the district. Natalie Pakoa from VASSIC followed up with various ASSI participants after the dialogue events to record oral histories and to document family stories.
- A body of research was undertaken that has enabled families to work with the Queensland State Archives to locate ancestors and descendants. The State Archives have had a presence at all activities that were part of ASSI 150 commemorations. A Fiji tour of the Echoes exhibition is being planned. The ASSI 150 SEQ exhibition has been made available for touring within Australia through Museums and Gallery Services.
- Teacher resources were developed based on the research undertaken as part of the ASSI 150 project and Echoes exhibition. This information is available via free download from the web to schools and articulates with the National Curriculum.

What worked well?

The event made the best use of the resources in the community through collaboration and partnerships by supporting arts and culture initiatives that demonstrate cooperation and collaboration between community organisations, schools and business. The event had the potential at times to develop into a platform for political agendas but through skilful and sensitive management during the process the planning stayed on track and achieved the desired outcome. The planning committee worked tirelessly on uniting the different stakeholders in the project under the intention of the united goal of recognising and commemorating the achievements of the South Sea Islanders in the region 150 years ago. The planning was successful in achieving its goal of working in a respectful, graceful and peaceful manner, setting the groundwork for a new chapter to be written in Scenic Rim history.

Serge Loode stated:

The project was unique, in that it was the only ASSI 150 project, which brought together Australian South Sea Islanders, Mununjali Traditional Owners, and descendants of the original plantation owners, current landowners, and the wider Beaudesert community. The opportunity to share stories and build relationships was appreciated by all participants and lead to important discoveries of shared ancestry and history. Members of VASSIC voiced that being welcomed to country by the traditional owners at the end of the commemorative walk was the first moment that they felt really welcome and at home in Australia.

The project and the event also assisted in the creation of a new identity, new history and new cultural traditions for Australian South Sea Islanders and Aboriginal people. The commemorative walk was an opportunity to come to terms with a past history based on indentured labour and coerced migration.

The Mununjali people and the Australian South Sea Islanders created a new cultural protocol on how to recognise and acknowledge Traditional owners and Australian South Sea Islanders.

These are significant outcomes which will last well beyond the celebrations of the commemorative event.

It was important, in the planning stages of the event, to consider the impact of the event long after the day's activities had concluded. The inclusion, in the RADF grant, of a filmmaker to document the entire event provided a product that captures the essence and spirit of the walk and the festival.

Natalie Pakoa stated in a letter to the filmmaker:

I would like to say a big thank you for your time, commitment and the spirit of amazement and overwhelming community presence that you have brought to film. It is clearly evident of who you are as a young filmmaker through your portrayal of significant stories that mean so much to so many. You have done yourself proud and most definitely you have made the Australian South Sea Islanders community proud to have you play a vital role in the project and create an historical piece of art for generations to come.

What's next?

- Scenic Rim Regional Council has committed funds through its Artist in Residency program and a strategic initiative funded by RADF to commission a Wayfinding sculpture on the site of the original Townsvale Plantation.
- Discussions continue between VASSIC, the Vanuatu Council of Chiefs and the Australian Government regarding dual citizenship.
- DATSIMA, Scenic Rim Regional Council and community stakeholders have formed a networking group to identify regional issues for cultural diversity.

Reflections

The committee underestimated the time, skilful negotiations and facilitation which would be needed to bring together the stakeholders of differing values and world views to commemorate this event. Significantly more information, communication and planning was required than was originally estimated.

Resolving issues of precedence, protocol and privacy which would give respect to all the stakeholders involved was more involved than initially expected, however by addressing these issues in a respectful way we managed to move forward. By negotiating some of these conflicts the stakeholders built lasting relationships beyond the project itself. The day exuded friendship and harmony and this is a tribute to those who took the small steps to plan the event respectfully.

Contact for further information

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