

CHRIS BURKE IS THE CREATOR OF JANNAWI KIDS, A SERIES OF puppet characters who tell their stories about living with domestic and family violence. Using humour and a child's perspective they help kids and adults face the difficult issues that arise in violent families by putting the issues out front, but at a bit of a distance – it can be the puppet kids' problem.

In 2002 when Chris returned from a trip to the NT where one indigenous community had taken his way of working and made their own life size puppets, the Kids View project was born, with partners Yoorana Gunya Family Violence Healing Service in Forbes, Central West Family Support Service and the NSW Attorney General's Violence Against Women Unit and funding from the Regional Arts Fund

The idea was to bring an artist to work with groups of women in Condobolin and Lake Cargelligo to help them create their own puppet to tell the stories of importance to them or their community, particularly around violence and abuse.

Chris was keen to be involved, he said, *"because I have seen in other work how creative processes can help raise self esteem and provide a very powerful means of communication. There is a healing role in people's lives when the concerns of the individual and the community are connected in these ways."*

Chris ran a pilot workshop with 14 women in May. He commented, *"Each person made their own puppet in the workshop and it was great to see the way people identified with the puppets, saw similarities with people they knew."*

Coordinator of Central West Family Support, Tess Kelly, said, *"The women's group has been exploring how poetry and drama can help express our feelings about what is happening or has happened in our lives – especially when it is painful or overwhelming. The women were excited with the chance to extend this to puppets and see it as something they could continue to grow and develop, initially for themselves but hopefully later for others as well."*

Making it the puppet's problem

by LIZ MACRAILD



25

Photos: The type of puppets made at the Condobolin workshops using latex and molds; Chris Gaskin in his workshop.

Violence is a pervasive issue in Indigenous communities. It is not easily disclosed or openly talked about. Kids' View provides the means by which participants can create their own expression of the pain, grief and hope that go hand in hand with issues of violence and abuse of trust; and later encourage the same expression in their communities by public use of the puppets.

Originally our plan was to make puppets, develop scripts, and train women to use the puppets with health workers and groups of kids but we soon realised this was a huge ask in a short time. It the long term aim but it will now be done in stages to ensure we build skills at each level and can respond to the women's interests as well. For example there is an interest in the group in learning about performance and scenery.

Cooma puppet artist Chris Gaskin, who had experience working with Indigenous communities, was recommended for the project.

Yoorana Gunya coordinator Donna Bliss is clear that about the value of cultural expression as a means of assisting communities deal with key issues of identity, conflict, openness and change. *"Arts based projects are good because people across the community can be involved, from elders to kids. People can get yarning while they are doing things with their hands. It's not so 'in your face'. And one thing leads to another. Already there have been other spin offs from the Kids View project... Because Chris was going to be up this way for the first workshop, we asked him to be part of a 2 day regional gathering of women and children in Condobolin. He ran workshops for the kids and did some performances and story telling for the whole group that were a real highlight... And we will all come out of it with stronger ways of working together and new ideas of community healing."* ■

Liz MacRaid is the Regional Violence Prevention Specialist at the Attorney-General's Department's Violence Against Women Unit.

October

22 October

🎭 *Carmen* by Bizet presented by Co-Opera and Outback Arts to be performed in **LIGHTNING RIDGE**. Tel 6822 2484
Email admin@oubackarts.com.au

23 - 25 October

🌿 Outback Summit 2003. Focusing on environmentally sustainable means of managing Australia's physical environment. Themes include Fire, Water, Earth and Air. Tel 03 9654 7473
Email conference@eianz.org
Website www.eianz.org

24 October

🎭 *Carmen* by Bizet presented by Co-Opera, Outback Arts and Bourke Arts Council to be performed in **BOURKE**. Tel 02 6822 2484
Email admin@oubackarts.com.au

25 October

🎭 *Carmen* by Bizet presented by Co-Opera, Outback Arts and Cobar Arts Council to be performed in **COBAR**. Tel 02 6822 2484
Email admin@oubackarts.com.au