

Community Leadership

This Community Leadership website is the result of a partnership project between the Education and Research Unit of [Volunteering Queensland](#) and the School of Learning and Professional Studies (within the Faculty of Education) [Queensland University of Technology](#).

Development of the site was made possible through a [Queensland University of Technology](#) Community Services Grant received in 2002 and 2004.

Paul Songhurst – Case Study

“Leaders in our community come in a wide range of forms. I think the general view of community leaders is that of public figures, such as politicians and the like. There are many other kinds of community leaders in society though – many of these lead by example and I think this is one of the most important qualities of a leader.”

(Paul Songhurst)

Paul is currently pursuing his interest in the *“interaction (or collision) between people and the natural environment”* working as a landscape architect, which gives him the opportunity to work on *“a range of projects that are beneficial environmentally, socially and culturally”*.

This passion also inspires Paul to co-ordinate a youth-focused environmental organisation/network/project called Youth Environment Society (YES), whose mission is *“to inform, inspire and empower young people to make positive change regarding our environment, both natural and cultural”*, which closely links to Paul’s personal vision.

In his role with YES Paul works in an advisory capacity to state and local government regarding issues of biodiversity, accessibility, sustainability, environment and natural resources and regional planning issues. In the past he has facilitated and co-ordinated a number of interesting projects that would generally fall into the realm of *“creative responses to environmental concerns”*.

Paul’s inspiration is ultimately derived from an *“optimistic outlook on life and the world around us... I see the work of community collectives as being incredibly important for the community”* Paul states.

If he considered himself to be a ‘community leader’, Paul would say his major achievements have been producing *“creative responses to environmental and social concerns”* through various projects with YES and Brisbane City Council’s Visible Ink program.

“YES was effectively formed with the aim to respond creatively to a wide array of ‘environmental’ concerns. In looking at certain environmental concerns, such as air pollution, land degradation, erosion, salinity, habitat loss, resource consumption and so on, one can start with traditional responses to environmental concerns such as tree planting and similar hands-on responses. It was identified early on that there is a significant contingent tackling such responses and it was an aim of YES to look at different ways to

create positive change for our environment and in doing so, involve a wide array of young people in our community, often those that would not be directly involved in such things as tree-planting and the like.

I have always seen festivals as being incredibly positive outlets for creativity, inspiration, information and networking. I have attended the Woodford Folk Festival and prior to that the Maleny Folk Festival since I was very young. The experience of such festivals has shaped my perspective of what a festival should or indeed could be like, so I looked at taking this to a wide range of young people in the community with the aim to explore what a youth focused environmental festival should, or could be like.

In the first six months of 2002 I coordinated a series of Workshops that looked at exploring this concept of a youth focused 'Environmental Festival'. These workshops, which were attended by a wide array of young people from the greater-Brisbane area, looked at the sustainability (triple bottom line), content, running, logistics etc of such an event. These workshops were held at Visible Ink Space in Fortitude Valley – available as part of Brisbane City Council's youth participation and consultation strategy.

One of the many great ideas that emerged from this workshop series was the concept of a recycled fashion parade. It also emerged that one of the ways that young people can endeavour to make positive change for our natural and cultural environment is through "piggy-backing" festival events with components that aim to challenge the status quo in a creative, non-confrontational and non-political manner. So, RE:fashion was born.

RE:fashion initially manifested in the form of a recycled fashion component of the Valley Fiesta in 2002. This involved on-stage fashion parades, a Recycled Fashion Concept store set-up in a shop front on the Brunswick Street Mall and spontaneous street performance as an expression of the creativity imbued in the project. Since then this project continuum has re-emerged several times in a range of forms such as at the Sustainable Living Fair in late 2004 held at Rocks Riverside Park. At this fair a sew-off challenge was incorporated which featured two teams randomly grouped who were given a range of industrial discards, pre-loved clothing and sewing machines and challenged to create the most creative re-fashioned response.

As part of the 2003 Visible Inks Festival, I co-ordinated a component called in situ (Latin for in-place). In situ is an exploration of youth cultural landscapes. This project, as part of National Youth Week, involved young people claiming King George Square in front of City Hall as a place for young people."

Paul admits there are many challenges that one faces as a community leader... *“not least of which is time, or lack thereof...the main challenge I currently face is finding the luxury of time outside of work. As a result, my focus has been directed towards fulfilling my personal vision through my work as a young professional.”*

Another challenge has been sourcing funding to be able to generate the desired outcomes through these projects. To overcome these challenges, Paul believes in being *“professional, positive and creative”*. As he says,

“I guess the main way I have found to work around the funding issue is to generally reduce running costs wherever possible. Initially YES was run completely out of my study with my own personal resources, we had meetings in a café and generally looked at things in a creative social atmosphere – and in many ways things haven’t changed a lot. The emergence of Brisbane City Council’s Visible Ink Space in Fortitude Valley was of huge assistance. Having this space to meet, to create, to network and workshop was immensely valuable in generating the ideas for projects, but then also to link with funding opportunities to help bring ideas into reality”.

Tackling the challenges is made worthwhile for Paul by the *“great sense of satisfaction and accomplishment in overcoming the odds- of making a difference and positively contributing to the community and the world around us”*.

If he became a mentor, the key values, skills and experiences Paul would pass on could be summarised as *“professionalism, respect, creativity, networking, partnerships, enthusiasm and integrity”*...and most importantly, *“to stay true to yourself”*.