

Upper Yarra Fire Cycle



The Upper Yarra Fire Cycle project consisted of five performance modules in a larger Fire Cycle project originating from the Dandenong Ranges Music Council (DRMC). The combined performance was held at the Belgrave Heights Convention Centre in October 2005. The Fire Cycle project engaged a wide range of people from schools, the CFA, a circus group, the Shire of Yarra Ranges (SYR), the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), Parks Victoria and local musicians. Each participant had a wide contact and support group and the wider community followed their adventures in the media.

In Upper Yarra, 28 students from Grades 3-6 of Warburton Primary School created and performed the Natural Fire Zone song: 'We're in a natural fire zone, forests, fuel and flames, Living with fire in our mountain home, on the Great Dividing Range'.

The involvement of 25 Worawa Aboriginal College (Healesville) students in creating and performing a Fire Cycle song is the first instance of that college's involvement in the wider community for performances of this type. The composer engaged by the DRMC had already worked with indigenous people elsewhere and had a powerful understanding of their perspective. With the composer, the students produced a song called Fire Tree: 'Fire tree, fire tree, gives life, Fire stick, fire stick, unlocks the sun, Works with the coolamon, Hedycarya, Hedycarya, Yellow mulberry, Hedycarya, Hedycarya, That's the fire tree, The fire tree.'

SYR employees attended a workshop and produced a song called Deep Time: 'The bush does what the bush does in its own deep time'.

A very moving When Red Threatens Green was performed by workers from DSE and Parks Victoria. 'In the morning, the sun is rising, My day is planned, but the temperature's rising... My work's in the forest, so I'm rarely seen, But I'm there beside you when red threatens green.'

Fire's Comin' was created and performed by 19 students and two teachers from Gladysdale Primary School, and was supported by a large choir in performance.

The five Upper Yarra modules can be performed individually, but a special narrative was written to group four of them so they could be performed at Belgrave as one 'Upper Yarra' presentation. The larger Fire Cycle performance had a cast of 200-300 and was performed before an audience of two or three times that number. Over 200 Upper Yarra community members had input into these songs, which are performed at local events and in schools. The Fire Cycle was planned as a complete project, but it lives on in a Fire Cycle education pack containing CD, words and music.

From Bev McAllister

What can we learn?

Ready for change

Making a start

A previous successful bushfire recovery project (see Spirit of the Mountain story) alerted the DRMC to the importance of fire in the lives of the Shire's residents.

Strength in numbers

The Fire Cycle grew and grew – 'everyone who heard about it wanted to be part of it'.

Mapping your assets

Learning from others

A professional musician with skills in working with community was engaged.

Have a plan

Getting your message out

Various groups heard about the project and asked the DRMC if they could be part of the performance.

Resources & partnerships

This was the huge strength of this project. DRMC linked to:

- schools
- musicians
- CFA
- circus group
- Shire of Yarra Ranges
- Department of Sustainability & Environment
- Parks Victoria

Resilience in tough times

Keeping things going

The Fire Cycle lives on as an education pack of CD, words and music.