

Presentation for Rural Mental Health Conference

We all have dreams. Sometimes, with luck, support, perseverance or hard work -- most often a combination of these -- our dreams will come to fruition.

In Portland I discovered that there were others who shared my dream of building a mosaic bench seat. There was even some money available. Exciting. Of course there were processes to go through. There were plans to be drawn up and approved by council.

Finally the project was approved and a proposed site agreed on. It was time to begin.

It was important to involve as many people as possible, so posters were put up offering free mosaic workshops and ongoing articles were printed in the Arts pages of the Portland observer inviting community participation. We ended up being able to involve both secondary schools, Kyeema, the special development school, some Rotary club members as well as many members of the general community. These all worked along with the Aspire participants. There were over one hundred people participating in this project.

To minimize the risk of vandalism and because of the amount of detail in the design, I held workshops in the leadlighting area of The Arts Company. This proved to be a great place to work.

These workshops enabled people to learn an indirect method of developing mosaics. This technique meant that we produced many small mosaic picture panels. These would later be cemented onto the seat. These workshops were a very friendly place to be, with people sharing ideas, thoughts and expertise.

The really hard work was yet to come.

It was necessary to build the seat itself outside (through lack of a suitable undercover venue) and, as we all know, the weather cannot be relied upon.

Due to the nature of cement, this stage of the project had to take place over a three week period -- with most of the work being done over the weekends (until the deadline drew near and it was all hands on every day for the last week or so.

We began with a welded metal armature (framework) with polystyrene infill over which we moulded layers of chicken wire. After applying several layers of cement we ended up with the basic couch shape. Everyone worked extremely well together in all weathers and until all hours (sometimes until well after dark) This commitment was wonderful to see. There were times, though, when the rain was driving under the tarpaulin during some typically squally storms that this commitment was greatly challenged.

The development of the seat took place in a public laneway and there was much interest shown by passersby. There was even one occasion when a passerby returned with cups of coffee and biscuits for each of the workers. Finally, after much work by so many wonderful people, the day came for the installation of the seat. Breaths were held as the crane lifted the seat onto the back of a truck for transportation to the site. After a few minor hiccoughs and the obvious expertise of the crane operator, the seat was lowered into place and we were all able to release our held breaths.

This seat is now pointed out as one of the landmarks of Portland and, as such, is an ongoing monument to all those who took part in this project. The final photograph shows the portion of the seat which was developed entirely by ASPIRE participants.