Promoting health—using your arts ‘skill set’ in a rural health promotion

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The health promotion role requires an ability to work across the health promotion continuum, using frameworks such as the Ottawa Charter and working in effective partnerships. However, in a rural setting it is often the coalface community-based activities that create the platform for the behavioural change required to improve wellbeing.

A skill set such as acting can be the secret weapon in your health promotion armoury. It became apparent that using performance skills could be used to effectively and memorably sell important health messages to the community. Once immersed into whatever character is required humour is more than often the other important message/educational driver.

In the health promotion role one can create the concept/event, write the plans, secure funding and partnerships, design evaluation and marketing tools, everything in between, run the event and then at some point ‘frock up’ to MC or do a ‘set’ and use the character to value add to the health-based activity.

In this rural community ‘The Dame’ for example is incredibly popular with the very young, the very old and everything in between. She is extremely versatile and promotes healthy eating (Go for 2 & 5), literacy, active ageing, falls prevention, sexual health (men’s and women’s), Aboriginal and Islander health and more. When events such as the Stay on Your Feet Expos are evaluated, for example, it is the Dame and her messages that are recalled and motivate change and a desire to attend other events. She is quite the drawcard. The Dame has been engaged by other health services to support their events and even opened a health promotion conference.

Many in the communities still do not know the Dame’s real identity (and she likes it that way). Others believe the Dame is her full-time job! Sadly the Dame is not a ‘triple threat’ and can only imagine how much more effective she could be if she could sing and dance.

‘Arts in health’ has a proven track record. So don’t keep your arts skill set for outside your work, if you see an opportunity to combine health and your skill set at least try it as it may well become your secret health promoting weapon in your rural community, just like hiding the vegies in children’s meals. Good for them and they don’t know it.