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 in effective partnerships across the health promotion continuum using frameworks such as the Ottawa Charter to improve and maintain wellbeing.

In a rural setting it is often the ‘coalface’ community based activities that create the platform for the behavioural change required to improve wellbeing and achieve objectives.

A skill set such as acting can be the secret weapon in your health promotion armoury. Using your performance skills can be used to effectively and memorably sell important health messages to the community. Humour in particular is an effective message/educational driver.

Whilst undertaking your Health Promotion role creating the concept/event, planning, marketing, evaluation and everything else in between there may be an opportunity to don a costume to compere or do a ‘set’ and use your character to value add to the health based activity.

In our rural communities the character “The Dame’ has become incredibly popular with the very young, the very old and age in between. This character is non-threatening and extremely versatile. She has promoted healthy eating (Go for 2 & 5), literacy, active aging, falls prevention, sexual health (men’s and women’s), Aboriginal and Islander health and more. When events that the dame has a significant role are evaluated it is ‘The Dame’ and her messages that are recalled.

This character has compered small and large health events such as; Come and Try & Stay on Your Feet® Expos, trivia nights, wellbeing festivals, cooking demonstrations, mental health family fun days, seniors activities to name a few. Drilling down into the evaluations it appears that ‘The Dame has the ability to motivate change and increase the desire to attend events. ‘The Dame’ is quite the drawcard and has been engaged by other health services to support their events and even opened a health promotion conference.

Over the years this character in particular has been warmly embraced by the communities and established her branding as a promoter of health and well-being. Many people in these rural communities still do not know ‘The Dames’ 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 her loving creator 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 the experience of this health promotion officer is that if you recognise an opportunity to combine health and your skill set at least try it, it may well become your secret health promoting weapon, especially in a rural community. By doing this you can value add to your activity in a cost effective way, maintain control over your messaging and have fun while you are doing it.