



## **Expressions—promoting wellbeing and social inclusion within a rural community through the arts**

**Lee Martinez, May Walker-Jeffreys, Mellissa Kruger**

University Department of Rural Health, UniSA

The new '*Bringing it all together*': Guidelines for Arts and Mental Health Projects developed by Country Health SA and Country Arts SA has a main aim of increasing opportunities for social connection using arts and culture as an opportunity to improve wellbeing.

'Expressions', an eight week program, provided an opportunity for rural consumers of mental health services to participate in an 'arts in mental health' program within their local community which resulted in an exhibition of their work being held during South Australian Living Artists (SALA) festival at a local gallery space.

Artistic expression was the main aim of this community arts project, with participants demonstrating varying levels of prior arts knowledge and ability.

This presentation will discuss the engagement process, provide an insight into the process of delivering such a program, pre and post evaluation of participants using a baseline social inclusion scale and provide insight to public response to an exhibition of works from the program.

We believe that art plays a valuable role in engaging people who may be marginalised due to having a mental illness. It allows participants to switch off from issues that may be distressing them, promoting wellbeing and social inclusion.

We anticipate that this presentation will add to the evidence base of how arts and mental health can strengthen community connections.