

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

Bulletin

OCTOBER 2003



KIDS AT RISK
Major study into
child protection

TIRED EYES
New tests for
better learning?

Bulletin

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Focus on children:
Research to protect kids at risk – and national vision screening study for schools, see pages 3 and 5.

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What you eat, where you live



How do these factors affect your health?

La Trobe University began a groundbreaking survey in Melbourne in September and October to ascertain how the facilities in people's neighbourhoods can affect their health.

Dr Anne Kavanagh of La Trobe's Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS) heads a team of investigators to determine whether food outlets and recreational facilities in different neighbourhoods affect the choices people make in terms of their health.

Selected at random from the Australian Electoral Roll from 19 municipalities, the 8,000 participants were divided into two groups. One group completed a survey titled 'You and Your Neighbourhood' and the second group a survey titled 'Food Shopping and Your Household'.

Funded by VicHealth the project is titled VicLANES (Victorian Lifestyle and Neighbourhood Environment Study).

Project Manager, ARCSHS research officer Ms Tania King, said people were asked about the kinds of food they bought

and where, and whether desired foods were always available. They were also asked about recreational facilities and activities. The team also conducted an audit of facilities in each area.

'It is important to know what is in a neighbourhood,' Ms King says. 'For example, if there are no footpaths, or there are significant safety issues, people are not going to walk a great deal. Similarly, if there are very few stores stocking fresh food, people will have difficulty purchasing and eating quality fresh food.'

First analysis of the data is expected to be completed by the middle of next year. The research will be useful to many groups in the community, especially for the State Government and local councils' planning facilities.

The research team comprises Dr Anne Kavanagh, Ms Tania King, Ms Emma Rawlings (La Trobe University); Associate Professor David Crawford and Associate Professor Damien Jolley (Deakin University); Dr Gavin Turrell (Queensland University of Technology); Ms Susan Donath (University of Melbourne). ■

Research helps children at risk

Professor Shane Thomas from La Trobe University's School of Public Health has been engaged by the Victorian Department of Human Services to conduct major research into child protection.

He and his team will carry out a research and evaluation project concerning the Victorian Child Protection Innovations Program, established through the Department's Community Care Division.

Eight projects have been set up in six local government areas under the Innovations Program, two working specifically with Indigenous families. These projects aim to divert families from statutory child protection services to community-based services, thereby reducing the progression of families into the Child Protection system.

'The priority is research that enables the early identification of children at risk and early intervention so that better outcomes can be achieved for them,' Professor Thomas said.

La Trobe University has a high profile in Child Protection research. Professor Thomas conducted the Victorian Child Protection Client and Family Survey in 2001. He said the 2002/03 State budget included more than \$15m on new initiatives to address issues identified in the survey.

In another project, Professor Thomas will work with La Trobe University School of Social Work and Social Policy's Deputy

Head, Margarita Frederico, and David Green, an Associate Professor, on a research and evaluation program of 'Take Two' Intensive Therapeutic Services.

'Take Two' is a program that identifies and treats children and young people who have experienced severe abuse and neglect.

The Victorian Government has committed \$20 million to the program, which is being implemented by a consortium which also includes Berry Street Victoria, Austin Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and the University of Melbourne.

La Trobe University is a member of this consortium, and has been charged with leading its research and evaluation program.

Professor Thomas is also a co-principal investigator with two Monash researchers, Sandra Lancaster, an Associate Professor, and Professor Jim Ogloff, and the Department of Human Services on an Australian Research Council 'Linkages' project, 'Pathways from Child Protection to Juvenile Justice'.

Professor Thomas said: 'It is important



to gain a better understanding of how and why young people engage with health and community services and then provide advice to these services and to government about how to make the system work better for young people and their families.' ■

Is 'evidence-based' health policy possible?

La Trobe University academic staff have played major roles in editing and writing a book on evidence-based public health practices. Entitled *Problem and Possibilities*, it provides an insight into Australian health policymaking and structures.

The book includes an examination of how evidence is constructed and used in areas including Aboriginal health, complementary medicine, health inequalities, nursing, folate supplementation, safety of blood and blood products, oral health, primary health care, illicit-drug policy, pharmaceutical policy, and women's health. Head of the School of Public Health, Professor Vivian Lin, co-edited the book with Mr Brendan Gibson of the

Federal Department of Health and Ageing. Professor Lin also wrote two of the 22 chapters which cover 11 case studies

La Trobe Dean of Health Sciences, Professor Stephen Duckett, wrote the introduction. Other La Trobe University staff members who contributed include Ms Sophie Hill, Drs Rosalie Aroni and Ken Harvey, Associate Professors David Legge and Jeanne Daly (Public Health), Ms Anne Mitchell and Dr Anne Kavanagh (ARCSHS), Professor Judith Lumley and Dr Stephanie Brown (Centre for the Study of Mothers' and Children's Health), Professor Evan Willis (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences), and Dr Tom Keating. ■

When image *is* substance



Dr Wang with Mr Wendl and Mr Morganthaler.

Contaminated digital images may become clearer, thanks to a totally new intelligent system for colour image restoration developed at La Trobe University.

The new intelligent system is designed to reduce disturbance or 'noise' which may blur or distort an image, resulting in a clearer picture. It gives clients real-time access to a web site which 'filters' out the 'noise'.

For example a worn old photograph can be scanned and transmitted as a Jpg file. But often markings or faded areas on the old print result in disturbances or 'noise' in transmission. In other cases, a good image can arrive at its destination after being

distorted in transmission. The receiver of such distorted images can immediately divert the file to a web site which cleans up the image.

The technique can be applied commercially in a number of areas, as well as for military purposes. For example military targets – often identified from old photographs – can be clarified, enabling a target to be identified more clearly. Dr Dianhui Wang, a lecturer in La Trobe University's School of Computer Science and Computer Engineering, has produced a prototype of the new system and is working to bring it to a stage where an industry partner could take steps towards commercialisation.

Early stages of the development have caused such interest internationally that overseas students have come to La Trobe

to be associated with the project. Recently two German students from the University of Applied Science at Landeshut, Bavaria, Marcus Wendl and Philipp Morganthaler, spent six months working with Dr Wang on the project. They contributed by implanting the neural image restoration algorithm and placing it on the web site.

Dr Wang says that a degraded image may be caused by various factors such as atmospheric turbulence, distortions in the optical imaging system, lack of focus, sensor or transmission noise, coding techniques, and object or camera motion.

'The task of image restoration is to remove these degradations to enhance the quality of the image for further use. Image restoration can be defined as a problem of estimating a source image from its degraded version.

'In the past, various approaches have been investigated to solve this fundamental and important issue for image processing.

'Our system is a pattern-learning based image restoration technique, using neural networks to enhance the quality of images, where *a priori* knowledge of the image-dependent edge information is incorporated into the regularised error measure to improve the upper bound estimation of the high frequency content'. ■

PUTTING THE 'H' INTO 'E-BUSINESS'

We've had 'the end of history' and now – thanks to digital technology and the burgeoning use of the internet – we are confronted by 'the death of distance'.

At a time of such rapid change, it is a breath of fresh air to find the words 'human-centred' before 'electronic-business' in a new book co-authored by La Trobe University's Rajiv Khosla.

Launching *Human-Centered e-Business* on La Trobe's main Melbourne campus at Bundoora, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Fred Smith said the book 'is a truly international collaboration with Rajiv's co-authors Ernesto Damiani from Italy and William Grosky from the US'.

It deals with the analysis, design and development of human-centred e-business systems in areas ranging from human

resource management, marketing, banking and finance to customer relationship management. These systems have a vast array of uses, from handling e-recruitment applications and the customisation of web sites to profiling the transaction behaviours of internet banking customers.

The book highlights the enormous growth of the internet and e-business, – which the OECD anticipates will grow to US\$1 trillion in 2003-4 – and predictions that this will lead to the 'death of distance', the 'digitisation of almost everything, and improvement in the information content of product and services'.

'However,' Professor Smith said, 'there is a danger that this process can lead to a serious breakdown at the human-computer interface.



Dr Khosla, right, with Professor Smith.

'This book contrasts the technology-centred approach – where the software development is driven by the technology – and the human-centred approach – where the needs of the user are central to the development.' Professor Smith said the human-centred approach involves three things: the modelling of software based on how people go about solving problems; its

TIRED EYES

New vision research for better learning

Vision disorders are the fourth most common childhood disability. As the ethnic mix of our society changes and the demand for academic achievement increases, are existing parameters for national screening programs adequate?

Many thousands of children in Australia should perform better at school thanks to vision research in which two La Trobe University researchers have played leading roles.

They are Dr Sheila Crewther, an Associate Professor, who is a psychologist and optometrist, and Dr Patricia Kiely, a research fellow, who is also an optometrist, both from the University's School of Psychological Science.

The Optometrists' Association of Australia is currently conducting an advertising campaign for school children to be tested for these eye problems – based on research data from Dr Crewther, Dr Kiely and their colleagues that one quarter of Australian children have some

development based on the needs of the user; and recognition of the context in which the problem is to be solved. 'The "Human-Centred Virtual Machine" integrates these criteria with the necessary technology.'

Dr Khosla said that customer orientation, service and global reach have become competitive imperatives.

'Deregulation of telecommunication industry and other industries, single currency zones and ever-changing business boundaries have further increased the potential for e-business. These changes have led to high customer sophistication and expectation.' ■

Human-Centred e-Business is published by Kluwer Academic Press.

form of vision problem.

Dr Crewther initiated multidisciplinary research while in the School of Optometry at the University of New South Wales where she worked with her husband, Dr David Crewther and Dr Barbara Junghans.

This research – which they later pursued with Dr Kiely – has led to the national campaign for school children to be tested for myopia (short sightedness), hyperopia (long sightedness) and focusing muscle co-ordination problems.

Dr Crewther said that despite school medical examinations, two thirds of vision problems go undetected, resulting in children under-performing at school.

'The problem is not that they cannot read what is on the blackboard but how long they can continue doing close-up tasks such as reading or writing or working on a computer.

'They become tired much more quickly than children with normal sight when performing such tasks and this causes them to "switch off" and to do something else,' Dr Crewther said.

The Optometrists Association's advertising campaign stems from a paper describing the screening of 2,697 children aged between three and 12 years in New South Wales co-authored by Dr Sheila Crewther and Dr Kiely with Dr David Crewther, now of Swinburne University of Technology, and Dr Junghans.

Dr Crewther said most previous screenings of child vision problems had been performed on predominantly Anglo-Saxon populations. The increasingly



cosmopolitan nature of cities in the UK, USA and Australia and the change in visual demands with greater needs for academic persistence, had raised the question as to whether past vision testing parameters were appropriate.

The survey resulted in 20 per cent of the children examined being referred for further assessment.

Dr Crewther, who has continued her research into visual behaviour since joining La Trobe's School of Psychological Science seven years ago, said that ocular or visual disorders were the fourth most common childhood disability – but because visual anomalies were not regarded as sufficient health problems, extensive vision screenings were seldom included in school medical assessments.

'The probability is that these children, after appropriate treatment for their problems, will perform at school at a higher level because they can sustain attention longer because they no longer have "tired eyes",' she said. ■



La Trobe University Bendigo's Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Dean, Professor Les Kilmartin, was recently farewelled by staff, students, civic and business leaders when he left the campus after eight years to take up a post in the private sector.

While the University and community acknowledged his wide-ranging contribution, Professor Kilmartin said his time in Bendigo had been 'the most rewarding, stimulating and exhilarating period' of his professional life.

La Trobe Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Osborne, said Professor Kilmartin had played a very strong and positive role in the development of the Bendigo campus and Faculty.

'The University is sorry to see the departure of one who has contributed so strongly, but understands the wish of Professor Kilmartin to explore a new career path.

'He has laid the foundations for a vibrant and significant regional university campus, which will be an exemplar for others. The fruits of many of his activities will be seen in the years to come.'

Chair of the La Trobe University Regional Advisory Board, Gordon McKern, said Professor Kilmartin was a champion for Bendigo, regional higher education and regional development.

'His personal approach and involvement in community projects, developing industry and business partnerships and increasing opportunities for regional people have significantly changed the face and the role the campus plays in the regional community.'

BENDIGO FAREWELLS LES KILMARTIN

City of Greater Bendigo Mayor, Cr Rod Fyffe, said Professor Kilmartin had left his mark on Bendigo. He had been instrumental in forming numerous working partnerships between the University and local organisations including the City of Greater Bendigo.

'His drive and vision have contributed to the realisation of many joint venture projects which are valuable assets to the region.'

Professor Kilmartin said when he took up the Bendigo post, he wanted to build a regional university campus that would 'take Bendigo to the world and bring the world to Bendigo'.

'Eight years on, I am enormously proud of what my colleagues and I have achieved in cementing the University's place within the regional community, the development of innovative new course programs unique in regional Australia, and the efforts achieved in building an international reputation for the campus as an excellent education and research facility.'

Professor Kilmartin listed the establishment of the University's Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities as a major achievement. 'The Centre is assisting many communities in social, economic and environmental development and has enormous potential to serve the region through its applied research and community outreach programs,' he said.

'I am very pleased to have overseen significant building and campus developments. The establishment of the new ICT centre, the proposed Visual Arts precinct in View Street and Central Victorian Innovation Park under construction, all offer exciting new opportunities for the University and the regional community.'

He said the appointment of senior academics, including five professors to the Faculty, was an important milestone providing new leadership and education and research opportunities for staff, students and the community.

A major driver of the internationalisation of the Bendigo campus, Professor

Kilmartin said the number of international students choosing to study in Bendigo has steadily increased with the campus attracting students from Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas.'

Professor Kilmartin said he planned to maintain strong links, professionally and personally, with the Bendigo community. ■

Peter Sullivan appointed Acting Pro Vice-Chancellor

Professor Peter Sullivan, Head of the University's Institute for Education, has been appointed acting Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Dean of the Bendigo campus.

With a wealth of academic and research knowledge and expertise, in recent years Professor Sullivan has directed two research projects to enhance student learning in mathematics in primary and secondary schools. ■



A look at Melbourne's West

The Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities (CSRC) recently completed a study on the economic impact of Federal Government's policy on the viability of manufacturing in Melbourne's West.

The study examined the value of retaining a strong cluster of industrial businesses in the region and the contribution of such a cluster not only to the economy of Melbourne's West, but also to those of Victoria and Australia.

It identified such current or proposed Federal Government policies as TCFV tariff reduction, a free trade agreement with the USA, petro-chemical industry compliance and defence shipbuilding as having, or possibly having, an impact. ■

See also: Small towns, BIG picture, page 9

Cockroaches upgrade the neighbourhood

Cockroaches scuttling across the kitchen floor are usually greeted with revulsion and insecticide.

But there are leafy neighbourhoods on the east coast of Australia where big, black cockroaches swarming in the best residences is not only normal – it's desirable!

The neighbourhoods are native Australian forests; the residences are rotting logs; and the cockroaches are the native Australian wood-feeding species *Panesthia australis* and *Laxta granicollis*.

According to La Trobe University geneticist, Dr David Runciman, wood-feeding cockroaches and other 'saproxylic organisms' – those that live in rotting wood – are critical to the health of our native forests.

Without them forests could not survive, because their activity, including 'recycling' fallen timber into nutrients, is vital to the functioning of the forest ecosystem.



Panesthia australis

Dr Runciman, right, is studying the genetic structure of native cockroach populations as part of a broader ARC-funded La Trobe University project, headed by Dr Paul Sunnucks, designed to ascertain the effects of forest fragmentation on log-dwelling invertebrates.

His colleague, Ms Christina Schmuki, is examining the effects of forest fragmentation on native Darkling beetles, *Apasis puncticeps* and *Adelium calosmoides*.

Building on a La Trobe University-funded pilot study of *Panesthia australis* conducted by Mr Sean MacEachern during 2001, the researchers have embarked on a study of cockroaches and beetles near Tumut, New South Wales, where large areas of native forest have been replaced by pine plantations.

Associate Professor, David Lindemayer of the ANU, has been examining the effect of forest fragmentation on vertebrates that rely on hollow log habitats in the same area for many years and the La Trobe research extends his studies to invertebrates



inhabiting rotting fallen timber.

By applying genetic markers – heritable characteristics that carry information about relationships among individuals and populations – the research team has collected preliminary evidence that cockroaches and beetles find it more difficult to move through 'islands of bush in a sea of pine' than through continuous native forest.

Dr Runciman and Ms Schmuki are comparing the abilities of cockroaches and beetles to move through two kinds of habitat. One is a series of small isolated blocks of remnant native forest, usually along creeks, surrounded by pines. The blocks are so far apart that movement from one to another is impeded and thus there is higher than normal interbreeding and greater genetic differences among areas.

The other is continuous native forest adjoining pine forests where man-made barriers are absent. In this natural situation invertebrates can cover long distances, enjoying a wide 'normal-sized' breeding pool.

'With modern molecular techniques we can now examine the genetic effects on

Continued page 13

HOW TO ASSESS THE HEALTH AND PROSPERITY OF COUNTRY TOWNS?

Shop for answers

Why are more shops empty in the main streets of southern New South Wales towns than in northern Victorian towns? And why is there a larger proportion of shops closed in small towns than in larger towns?

These are among questions that call for answers following results from a La Trobe University three-year research project to discover how the 'health' and prosperity of country towns can be comparatively assessed.

Sociology students in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe University's Albury-Wodonga campus – many of whom come from Victorian and NSW country towns – were assigned to count the percentage of shops that were closed for retail business in the main street of their home towns.

Forty-five towns are represented in the study, indicative of the wide catchment area for students on the Albury-Wodonga campus.

Under the direction of Professor Evan Willis, the students began their research in 2002 and repeated it in 2003, giving them a basis for comparison. The exercise will be carried out again next year, to incorporate the longer term effects of such factors as drought, serious fires and commodity prices.

Professor Willis says the trend towards relative loss of population from rural and regional Australia has been evident from census data for many decades. However, how these effects can be measured in country towns is problematic.

While the number of empty shops is important to the psyche of a town, discussions before the 'empty shop census' began, concluded that there were several drawbacks with the validity of empty shops as a measure of the health of towns.

These included short term causes of shop closures such as falling prices for commodities produced locally, and longer term causes such as the opening of new shopping malls away from the main street

or the opening of main street chain bargain price department stores.

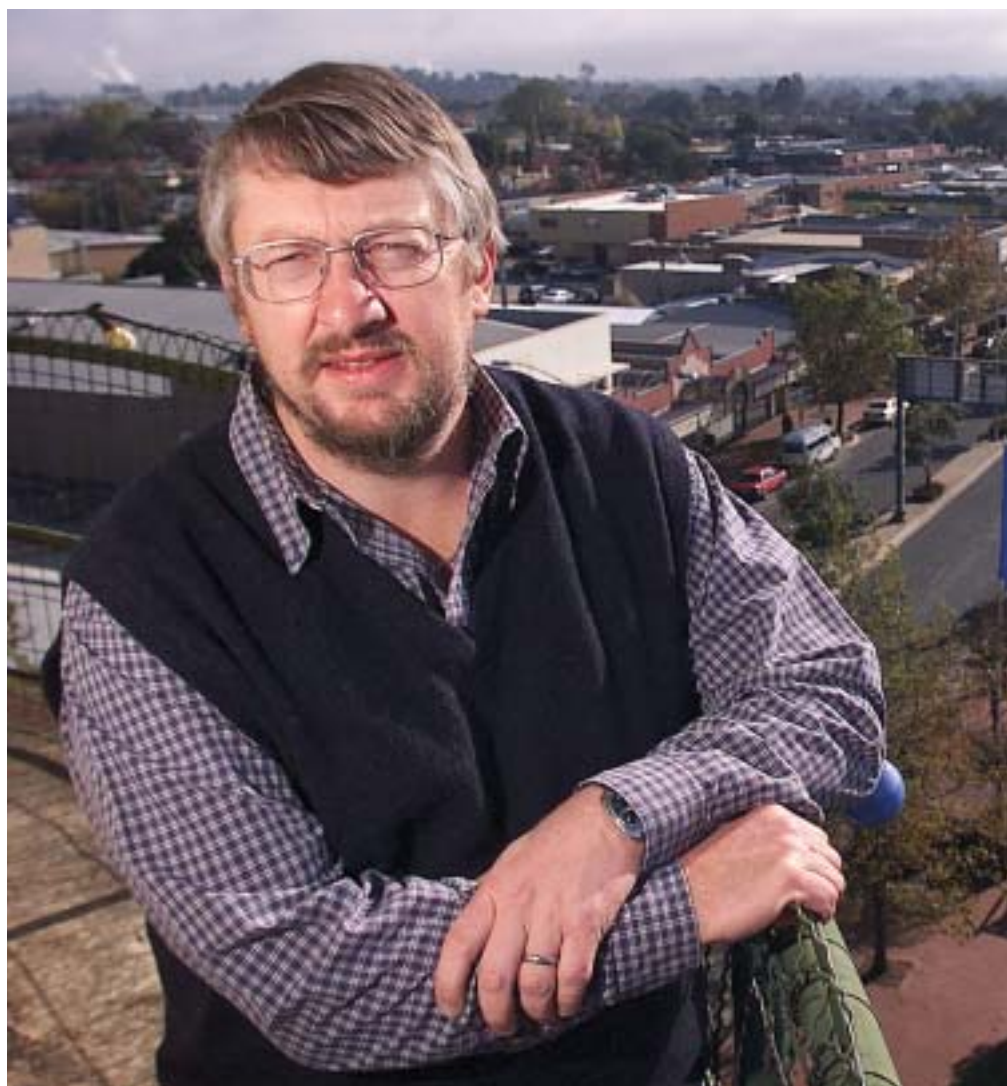
With these complexities in mind, the students are repeating as closely as possible the base study done in 2002 to ascertain what is happening over time. The towns examined had an average of 58 shops of which slightly more than 17 per cent were empty.

Professor Willis says it is possible in 24

Is there any evidence of the effects of the drought or the recent summer bushfires on the health of affected towns?

'None is obvious as yet,' he says, 'but it may be too soon to assess accurately. The results in 2004 may more representative of what is occurring'.

Important findings of the 2003 study are that NSW again has a higher average proportion of shops empty (22.1%)



towns to compare 2002 and 2003 figures to assess how the situation is changing over time – enabling the study to overcome the shortcomings of a 'snapshot' view.

compared with Victoria (14.9%). Small towns with below average number of shops are doing worse, with 30% empty, compared with larger towns where 8.9% were empty. *Continued page 10*

Small towns, BIG picture

La Trobe University Bendigo is helping five towns in central Victoria to secure a brighter, and more sustainable future.

Academics from the University's Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities (CSRC) are working with people in Dunolly, Wedderburn, Carisbrook, Maldon

Professor Willis: keeping an eye on rural traders.
Photo courtesy of Border Mail.



and Talbot in an unusual social research project called 'Small Towns Big Picture'.

It all comes together in October with a festival in each town to showcase the

outcomes of the research through art and the theatrical performance.

The project is developing a set of 'progress indicators' for each community's social, environmental and economic performance.

Project leader, La Trobe Research Fellow Dr Maureen Rogers, says it's a unique community development approach, which draws on cultural development techniques to engage and inform the community.

She says it has attracted world attention, with UN-Habitat and University College London showcasing it in a publication, *Sustainable Urbanisation: Bridging the Green and Brown Agendas*, a key contribution to the World Summit on Sustainable Development recently held in Johannesburg and also presented during World Habitat Day in Brussels.

The CSRC began the project more than two years ago with assistance from the Cultural Development Network of Victoria.

Seven artists have been commissioned to work with the communities and the researchers – using theatre and visual art – to engage the community in the strategy for a sustainable future.

Dr Rogers says the program has taken community planning and development to a new level by giving people of all ages a chance to participate in shaping their community's future.

'Small Towns Big Picture' comprises four projects: a Community Cohesion indicator, an Energy Footprint indicator, an Economic Activity indicator, and a Network Mapping project.

The Community Cohesion indicator explores the way a community satisfies nine universal basic human needs. A community which performs well is most likely to be a vibrant, responsive, innovative and inclusive community – hence socially sustainable.

Issues raised through the focus group have been captured in a theatrical

performance written by playwright Craig Christie.

The Energy Footprint (carbon emissions) indicator maps energy consumption in each town and links it to the amount of revegetated land needed to absorb the carbon emission.

Creative workshops enable people to become involved and to open up discussion about the likely impacts of climate change in the region. Dr Rogers says the Energy Footprint deals with the unsustainable impact of humans on the planet.

It measures the demand placed on nature by a given population through its consumption of energy, food, housing, transport, and consumer goods and services, and is interpreted as the amount of land needed to sustain current levels.

'This concept provides a readily understandable indicator of the problem and the feasibility of solutions in meeting reduction targets,' Dr Rogers says.

This part of the project also links the five towns with a region-wide initiative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions being supported by ten shire councils and a range of government agencies, La Trobe University and the Bendigo Bank – The Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance.

A unique community development approach...

Another project creates an interactive website for community organisations and groups in each town called a Community Connections Directory.

Dr Rogers says each project will 'produce information about the situation in each town, a suite of community-identified actions, and a creative interpretation including a theatrical performance, artworks – and a website to highlight the concept and the research findings.' ■

Improving lifestyles for adults with cerebral palsy

THE GYM'S THE THING



From left: Sport and Recreation Minister Justin Madden, Dr Dodd, Dr Taylor and Professor Vaughan Beck, Pro Vice-Chancellor (R&D), Victoria University who sponsored the award.

An award-winning program conducted by researchers from the La Trobe University Musculoskeletal Research Centre has improved the quality of life for adults with cerebral palsy.

At least, it has for ten people aged between 40 and 56 who participated in a gymnasium exercise program designed to build their physical strength.

Following the trial program in late 2002 and early 2003, La Trobe team leaders Drs Karen Dodd and Nicholas Taylor, senior lecturer Dr Helen McBurney and honours student Ms Jenni Allen, expressed delight at the enhanced physical strength of the participants.

In addition there was a totally unexpected bonus.

'When questioned at the end of the trial about the benefits they had received, the participants were unanimous that being in a gymnasium with lots of other people was the principal benefit. They really valued the community inclusion aspect of the program,' Dr Dodd said.

The program won the 2003 Victorian State Government Applied Research in Sport and Recreation Science Award. State Minister for Sport and Recreation, Mr Justin Madden, presented the award to the La Trobe researchers at a function in September.

The program followed a similar trial for children with cerebral palsy early in 2002. As a result of that success, the State

Department of Human Services and a team of staff at Scope (formerly the Spastic Society of Victoria) worked with Professor Meg Morris and the team from the Musculoskeletal Research Centre in La Trobe's School of Physiotherapy to develop a similar trial for adults.

'This is especially important for these people because the effects of ageing exacerbate their physical disability over the age of 40 years,' Dr Dodd said.

The ten volunteers – seven men and three women – attended a gymnasium at the Ascot Vale Leisure Centre for an hour once a week for four weeks to familiarise themselves with the location, transport, and the often crowded 'ambience' of the gym.

Then followed a twice weekly session of about one and a half hours for ten weeks doing exercises designed to strengthen arms, legs and trunk using conventional exercise equipment. An exercise physiologist and three qualified assistants supervised these sessions.

At the end of the program, each participant had increased their leg and arm strength and showed trends for increased speed of movement, and the time it took to sit and stand.

'Then there was the wonderful bonus of personal psychological factors – a sense of enjoyment and improvement in their self motivation and increased interest in their social environment,' Dr Dodd said. 'We hope the trial will lead to many more adults with cerebral palsy participating in similar programs,' she added. ■

Further information from Dr Dodd, Tel: 9479 5803.

Chronic pain, virtual bodies

La Trobe University's Faculty of Health Sciences will hold its annual research conference into 'Chronic Musculoskeletal Disorders' on Monday, 8 December, 2003,

on the main Melbourne campus at Bundoora.

The conference will provide clinicians with the latest research information that can be incorporated into their practices to improve outcomes for patients.

Topics will range from research into fracture healing, knee replacements, osteoarthritis and work-related musculoskeletal disorders to managing chronic injuries in professional footballers.

Keynote speaker will be Mr David Butler, Director of the Neuro Orthopaedic Institute, at the University of South Australia. His topic is: 'The virtual body – the rehabilitation paradigm for the future?' ■

For further details, Tel: 9479 3584 or see www.latrobe.edu.au

Shop for answers

Continued from page 8

Other findings are that regional centres – towns with 100 plus shops – were doing no better (10.1% empty) than larger towns in general (8.9% empty). Also in the period 2002–2003, many smaller towns increased the proportion of empty shops, while in larger towns the proportion more often decreased.

After the third phase of the study is completed next year, the students hope to have sufficient data to throw light on a number of issues. These include whether there is a measurable impact of drought and bushfires on the health of country towns over time, why large towns are doing slightly better than regional centres, and why Victorian towns continue to do better than NSW towns.

The data may also help illuminate what towns with small percentages of empty shops have in common, and what is common to those with large percentages of empty shops.

They will also address the question of what are 'normal' and 'abnormal' emptiness proportions caused by ownership turnover and refitting. ■

TORCH therapy

Shedding new light on schizophrenia treatments

La Trobe University psychologist, Mr John Farhall, is one of five chief investigators conducting a three-year research program to trial new treatments for people who 'hear voices'.

'We are seeking better psychological therapy for people with schizophrenia who experience auditory hallucinations that tell them to do things,' says Mr Farhall, a senior lecturer in the School of Psychological Science and a specialist in

greater than for people without disorders. Nonetheless, treatment is important because of the disability and distress from non-harmful commands, as well as risk.

'Such disorders are not uncommon. Perhaps one person in 300 in the general public will experience command hallucinations at some time in their lives.'

The NHMRC has provided a total of \$325,000 over three years for the researchers to work with 70 volunteers

project that clarified factors that were associated with obeying or resisting the voice commands. These factors included the disempowering 'relationship' that voice-hearers tended to have with their voice and the persuasiveness of friendly voices.

The volunteers – who will be given 15 therapy sessions and three or four assessment and follow-up interviews over one to one and a half years – will be divided into two groups.

One group will be given the TORCH therapy. This adapts cognitive behaviour therapy – a form of therapy well known for anxiety and depression – for the challenges of coping with voices. Participants will learn ways to understand and cope with hallucinations and how to resist acting on the commands.

The second group will undergo befriending therapy, a contrasting therapy that emphasises support and activity. It involves

steering volunteers away from talking about their problems and other subjects that cause stress. It emphasises positive, enjoyable subjects like hobbies, sport, current events, news, travel, and may also involve activities such as games or walking.

Mr Farhall says the team hopes to have preliminary results by the end of 2004 and to publish a full report in 2006. ■

More volunteers are needed for the project. Health professionals wishing to nominate volunteers can contact Dr Shawyer on tel: 8344 1875 or email: fshawyer@mhri.edu.au



Mr Farhall and Dr Shawyer, right.

therapy and rehabilitation for psychotic disorders.

Starting this year, the three year NHMRC-funded program is comparing a new form of therapy called TORCH (Treatment of Resistant Command Hallucinations) with an alternative treatment called 'befriending'.

'Command hallucinations are the voices some people with psychotic disorders hear telling them to do particular things. Commands range from annoying things like "Don't put your bag there" to potentially harmful things like, "Walk in front of the traffic",' Mr Farhall said.

'Contrary to popular opinion, the likelihood of people with psychotic disorders harming others is only slightly

aged between 18 and 65 who have heard voices telling them what to do – and who have suffered distress or disability from this despite medical treatment.

Professor David Copolov of the Mental Health Research Institute of Victoria (MHRI) is heading the team and La Trobe University PhD graduate, Dr Fran Shawyer is the project co-ordinator. They are joined by Professor Paul Mullen of the Victorian Institute of Forensic Mental Health (Forensicare) and two other MHRI researchers, Professors David Castle and Andrew Mackinnon.

Mr Farhall said that the command hallucinations treatment was prompted by previous La Trobe University and MHRI studies including a NHMRC-funded

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

John Waller's view of the land

John Waller in his campus studio, discussing his work with students.

How much landscape painting is just 'a form of wishful thinking'? A tantalising question – and one that was asked by Melbourne art critic and author, Christopher Heathcote, when he launched this year's successful series of exhibitions by La Trobe University Artist in Residence, John Waller.

Titled *Home Country: the art of John Waller* the exhibition features paintings from 1999 to 2003, completed by Mr Waller during his residency. It toured the Shepparton Art Gallery mid-year followed by the Bundoora Homestead Gallery, the La Trobe University Art Museum and heads to the Ararat Gallery in November.

Dr Heathcote, who is also a La Trobe graduate, said landscape artists have their own mental images of the country and therefore paint the world how they see it. There are the 'heroic', 'sentimental'

images of a Hans Heysen; the 'ruddy Dionysian beauty' of a John Olson; and the 'dull cheerless wastes' of a Fred Williams.

Waller's view, he says, has its origins in his childhood countryside around Mildura, on the New South Wales, Victorian and South Australian borders. This land, between the Murray River and the near-desert, 'appears to outsiders just a bleached arid expanse'.

But Waller perceives it differently, Dr Heathcote said. For him it's a land that 'connects people and place', that has 'echoed with the laughter of children since long before Moses' and he represents it by 'compositional squares (that) stand for the way Westerners try to tame and enclose the untameable'.

Organised by La Trobe Curator of Art Works, Rhonda Noble, the exhibition has

been drawn from the La Trobe University Art Collection. As part of the exhibition, Mr Waller gave public seminars about his works, and landscape painting in general.

Ms Noble said the University's Artist in Residency program is designed to 'nurture and educate' artists, students and the community and provides an established studio on La Trobe's main Melbourne campus at Bundoora.

Mr Waller holds 'open' studios sessions where he talks about his work, and the arts in general, with students from the Department of Art History and other areas of the University. He also visits regional campuses.

A former secondary school art teacher and lecturer in modern art at the National Gallery of Victoria, Mr Waller has been Artist in Residence at La Trobe since the start of 2000. ■

For details about forthcoming La Trobe University art exhibitions tel: 03 9479 2111.

La Trobe – Darebin art award winners

La Trobe University – which teaches art history on its main Melbourne campus at Bundoora and has a strong program in visual arts on its Bendigo campus – is also a vigorous supporter of visual art in the community.

The University sponsors a number of significant art awards, aimed especially at young and emerging artists.

The latest round of these were the Banyule – La Trobe University Young Artists Awards, valued at \$5,000, presented in September.

The award was shared by five winners: Chrystie Meade, Rachelle Downie, Andrew Harper, Daniel Gassin and Stephen Ames.

This follows the Darebin – La Trobe Acquisitive Art Prize in August, in which La Trobe awarded its \$3,000 best emerging artist prize to Fitzroy artist, Naomi Sunner. ■

KEEP POLITICS OFF THE FRONT PAGE?

Not if this Society has anything to do with it

Some of our leaders may be trying to keep politics off the front page – but at La Trobe University the Politics Society ensures it remains firmly on the agenda.

One of the most active groups on campus, comprising graduates, staff, students and other interested people, the society holds regular, well-attended public seminars. It numbers among its past speakers people like Kim Beazley, Meg Lees, Cheryl Kernot, Justice Michael Kirby, Malcolm Turnbull, Don Watson, Mary Delahunty and Phil Cleary, to mention just a few.

Iraq eyewitness

The latest seminar, 'Iraq Eyewitness', brought together news correspondent, Russell Skelton from *The Age* and Oxfam representative, Christine Stuart.

Mr Skelton spoke about his coverage of the second Iraq war from the Kurd areas of northern Iraq and his more recent reporting from both Iran and Afghanistan. Ms Stuart returned from Iraq in July after carrying out an emergency assessment of health, water and sanitation. She also spoke about her special interest in women in war.

Commentary came from La Trobe Head of Economics and Finance, Professor Imad Moosa. He had just returned from serving with a US Treasury team to help reconstruct Iraq's financial sector, the only non-American on the team.

'Iraq Eyewitness' was chaired by La Trobe Adjunct Professor and Visiting Scholar, Charles Mott, former Australian High Commissioner to Nigeria, a foreign service officer in Pakistan and former Australian Ambassador to Brazil, Spain and UNESCO.

Genocide – Indian style

This was followed by Indian intellectual, Ashis Nandy, who writes about cricket, human rights, and mass murder.

Delivering the Society's Annual Lecture in September, Professor Nandy's topic was 'Genocide – Indian style'. He said memories of the genocide that took place in South Asia during 1946-48 have framed the public life of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The two million killed have never been truly mourned because 'deadly silence fences the memories'. He explored the nature of the silence and argued that the violence also brought out a very different style of resistance among various community groups.

Professor Nandy is Director of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and chairs the Committee for Cultural Choices and Global Futures, both in Delhi.

Australia – 35 years on

On November 8, the Politics Society's 10th Anniversary Annual Dinner will deal with issues closer to home.



Mr Skelton at the Iraq seminar

The Society will present three of Australia's most thoughtful analysts reflecting on the state of the nation in the years since La Trobe University opened its doors in 1967.

La Trobe political scientists and authors, Dr Judith Brett and Professor Robert Manne, will be in conversation with Adjunct Professor Morag Fraser, on the subject: 'How's Australia Travelling? The Past 35 Years'

The event will be held at 7pm in the Eagle Bar, on the University's main Melbourne campus at Bundoora. ■

Bookings and further details from tel: 03 9479 2692 or email: r.jeffrey@latrobe.edu.au

Cockroaches upgrade neighbourhood

cockroaches and beetles of living in isolated communities and compare these to what happens in natural, larger native forest areas,' Dr Runciman said.

'This knowledge is vital to the future health of Australian forests. On average, over 500,000 hectares of bushland is deforested annually – equivalent to an area of around three football fields every five minutes.

'Native forests are becoming more fragmented every year. A major problem is that nobody knows what effect this will have

on what, at first glance, appear to be very robust invertebrates such as cockroaches and beetles. Our job is to find out. One obvious possibility is that isolated populations are in danger of extinction from random events such as fire or disease.

'More insidious effects may be that fitness will be reduced through inbreeding, and overall genetic variation decreased via reductions in population size and connectivity, thus making it harder for these animals to adapt to variations in environmental conditions such as those

expected with climate change.

'The genomes of our cockroaches and beetles are a goldmine of information. By the end of this project we will have solved these and many other problems related to habitat fragmentation', he added. ■

Australia has more than 400 species of native cockroach, most of which never venture into houses. The large, generally unpopular cockroaches found in houses are imports such as the American Cockroach, Periplaneta americana.

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Old rural railways as tourist attractions

Cycling, walking, or horse riding along Victoria's disused – and often very spectacular – railway lines have many benefits.

These include health benefits for the walkers, cyclists and equestrians – and economic benefits for those along the tracks who provide for their needs – and those further away who supply other goods and services.

La Trobe University senior lecturer in Tourism, Dr Sue Beeton, has completed a preliminary study to establish and quantify the different kinds of benefits from the development of Rail Trails, old railway lines converted for recreational use.

Her study aimed to establish impact in terms of direct and indirect employment and financial injection into the facilities.

She looked at three samples in Victoria – the East Gippsland Rail Trail; the Warburton Rail Trail; and the most developed and popular, the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail between Wangaratta and Bright.

She found that while those who provided accommodation for Rail Trail users benefited well, the biggest winners were those providing food and beverages.

However she found major differences between individual sectors funded by Rail Trail users in terms of their overall economic contribution to a region.

She said evidence gained about those differences were essential for business, facility and community planning.

Dr Beeton said that in order to capitalise on the opportunities that Rail Trails offer, their future must be secure, especially in terms of financial support for ongoing maintenance. ■

A copy of Dr Beeton's report, The Economic Benefit of Rail Trails in Victoria, is available via La Trobe University's School of Tourism and Hospitality website: www.latrobe.edu.au/tourism



Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Fred Smith, leads La Trobe cyclists in promoting 'Ride to Work Day' in October.

RIDE TO WORK!

La Trobe University recently took part in Bicycle Victoria's 'Ride to Work Day'.

Academic and administrative staff joined students and thousands of other Victorians on this annual ride for fitness – and for prizes that included helmets and bike lights as well as a free breakfast when they arrived on campus.

The University also pressed into service a piece of its own cycling history – an old-style delivery bike, which was recently restored.

A number of these bikes were used by staff in the mid-sixties to get around the then fledgling campus.

La Trobe volunteer co-ordinator, Kate Myers – a student liaison officer in the Careers and Course Service who cycles to work from Fairfield – said response from cyclists and community sponsors had been enthusiastic.

The day was sponsored by La Trobe University; the University's Sports and Recreation Association; La Trobe University Union; Finnigans Cycles, Northcote; Plenty Cycles, Preston; Ivanhoe Cycles; Paul's Cycles and Sports, Eltham; Walkers Wheels, Montmorency; Image La Trobe; La Trobe Bookshop; La Trobe Health Foods; La Trobe Jewellery; and La Trobe Pharmacy. ■

Flags fly for Indigenous Week

It's wonderful to fly the flag for Indigenous Week, La Trobe University's Pro Vice-Chancellor (Equity and Access), Dr Kerry Ferguson, said at the event's launch in September.

With three flags – the Australian, Aboriginal, and Torres Straits Islanders' flags – at the entrance to the main Melbourne campus at Bundoora, Dr Ferguson said it was timely to focus on developments in the Indigenous area.

She, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Fred Smith who launched the week, invited staff and students to celebrate at the many cultural and entertainment activities scheduled during the week.

'We had a fantastic response to the Hyllus Maris lecture held earlier this year, dealing with the Yorta Yorta land case, and we are proud of our commitment to host this annual lecture series,' Dr Ferguson said.

'Apart from celebrations, this week is also the time to reflect on issues Indigenous students have to struggle with.'

While Education Minister Nelson's review was 'long on the rhetoric of Indigenous participation in higher education', Dr Ferguson said it provided insufficient support in the final legislation.

However, she said plans were already under way on all La Trobe campuses to boost Indigenous enrolments. These included 'multiple entrance and exit points' to encourage more Indigenous people to come to the University and complete their degrees.

She said La Trobe was also finalising its new Indigenous employment strategy, with the first appointment scheduled for later this year.

The University plans to employ 30 Indigenous academic and administrative staff across all campuses during the next three to five years.

The strategy was developed following the University Council's unanimous support in 2000 for a 'Statement of Reconciliation'.

'To reflect the spirit of reconciliation, a process for developing the strategy was



largely determined by Indigenous staff and community members, with the full support of senior management.

The strategy was developed in partnership with the Department of Workplace Relations and with support and input from the National Tertiary Education Union. It also includes a mentoring component, as well as cultural awareness training for supervisors.

Highlight of Indigenous Week was a campus appearance by Aboriginal singer, song-writer and film-maker, Richard Frankland.

Frankland, above left, recently teamed with instrumentalist Andy Baylor, right, and former Tiddas member Lou Bennett, to form the 'Charcoal Club'.

The group played some of Frankland's poems, set to music by Baylor, as well as works featured on the soundtrack of Frankland's AFI award winning short film 'Harry's War'.

Other events included music by Liz Cavanagh, the film *Australian Rules*, and a special Indigenous Youth Day which included a bush tucker BBQ and featured hip-hop artist Johnny Mac.

Indigenous Week was supported by the University, its Ngarn gi Bagora Indigenous Centre, and the La Trobe University Union. ■

Drama turns on the tide of history

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'Then I went to the library and looked through the archives and there they were: my ancestors who campaigned for change and wrote things in newspapers in the 1930s. Since then, it's been an amazing journey, discovering things and piecing them together for myself.'

After graduating from La Trobe, Ms James worked first at Ballarat University and then at the University of Melbourne, helping set up education support units for Aboriginal students.

'But I knew the best way to educate people was through theatre, so I decided to specialise in that field, graduating in 1996 with a degree from the Victorian College of the Arts.'

While *Yanagai!* is Ms James' first full-length play, she has written smaller pieces and stage monologues and co-directed a number of works, including *Crowfire*, a play about identity, and *Magpie* which dealt with black and white relationships.

She says theatre is 'a place where oppressed people and classes can find unity, strength, power, expression and language'. And, she adds, it's about the only place in today's society where she can hear and speak the language of the Yorta Yorta. ■

Drama turns on the tide of history



Lisa Maza and David Adamson in a scene from *Yanagai! Yanagai!*
Inset: Andrea James at work.



‘It was the Min Min lights...’ said the Uncle with his dying breath. ‘They showed us the way home. Home!’

Drama, not history – and a chance encounter with a volume in the La Trobe University Bookshop – led Andrea James to her Aboriginal past and activist ancestors.

A La Trobe arts graduate with a double major in drama and social sciences, Ms James last month made a spectacular theatre debut, as writer-director of her first full-length work, *Yanagai! Yanagai!*

The play revolves around the loss of the Yorta Yorta tribal lands of her father’s family following European settlement. It took added shape over a number of years as the Yorta Yorta’s land rights claim went through the court system – finally to be rejected by the High Court last year.

Ms James, artistic director of the Melbourne Worker’s Theatre, originally planned the play for her company. But when Playbox Theatre Director, Aubrey Mellor, saw a workshop version at last year’s National Playwrights Conference it became a joint production, placing it squarely in the mainstream of Australian theatre.

During September it ran for a 17-day season at the Merlyn, the largest theatre at Melbourne’s CUB Malthouse in Southbank, attracting full-houses and school groups from throughout Victoria. And it received impressive reviews.

The Age newspaper described it as ‘an exceptional achievement; one that is both entertaining and illuminating, truthful and moving’. Its cast includes Lou Bennett, from Tiddas, who has also written some of the music for the play.

Ms James graduated from La Trobe in 1991. Her biggest influences, she says were classes with Head of Theatre and Drama, and Melbourne theatre critic, Geoffrey Milne, and a course on women in theatre.

Theatre, she says, has been her driving force since secondary school. She sees it as an ‘exchange of energy, both between people on stage and between the stage and the audience’.

‘It was a drama teacher – not a history teacher – who opened my eyes to critical aspect of our history such as the Aboriginal mission process and the 1967 census

referendum. He also introduced me to “status games” – how to put yourself into the position of someone of higher status and lower status – to actually feel what that’s like instead of just reading about it or being told about it.’

Ms James is a descendant of the Yorta Yorta and Kunai Aboriginal nations and has a Polish mother. She says while she always knew about her Aboriginal past, it had been ‘a bit obscure’ during her childhood.

‘My family spoke about where my dad grew up, but they didn’t really talk to me about political things until much later. It wasn’t until I was at La Trobe that I found out about the role of my relatives in agitating for change.

‘I just stumbled across it in the bookshop. I was looking through a book, *Blood from a Stone* by Andrew Markus, and I saw he had written about Shadrach James, my great grandfather, an Aboriginal activist.

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