



FRUSTRATED BY THE NEWS HEADLINES? SICK OF TRIVIAL PUB GOSSIP ABOUT WHO'S GETTING KICKED OFF *BIG BROTHER*? THEN THIS WEBSITE IS DESIGNED ESPECIALLY FOR YOU, **ACT NOW**, YOUR ONE-STOP SHOP FOR LETTING OFF STEAM ABOUT ISSUES THAT CONCERN YOU — AND TAKING ACTION TO HELP. **ELIZABETH BENTLEY FINDS OUT MORE.**

JUST DO IT

KELLY BETTS, PROGRAM MANAGER AT ACT NOW, SAYS that since the launch of the website in May this year, they've been getting 2000 hits a day; which isn't bad for a generation typically considered more interested in their latest mobile than in saving the planet.

"The idea is that when you read about an issue, you see that it's been written by someone just like you. You can read a member's profile and realise that they're not a hippy, they're not a school captain — they're kind of like you."

Act Now developed with the aim of inspiring to improve the mental wellbeing of young people by helping them get involved in their communities. Jack Heath, a former speechwriter for Paul Keating, who left his high-powered career in Canberra when his cousin committed suicide in rural Victoria, started its parent organisation, Inspire Foundation, in 1997. At the time, says Betts, Australia had the highest suicide rates in the world. A year later they launched Reach Out, a website to help young people get through tough times.

"The strength of Reach Out was that we kept young people really close to us and they told us what issues they wanted to know about, how to write them, how to market the program, how to structure the website," says Betts. "But then they said, 'Look, this is an amazing volunteer opportunity. You talk to us, you trust us. Being engaged with you guys in this

way is actually making me happier'."

One beneficiary of Act Now is Jess Abramovich, a third-year undergraduate in Social Work at the University of Sydney. Originally placed as an intern, she's continued her involvement with Act Now.

"When you go to uni, people are like, 'Are you political?' As a young person you're so quick to say, 'No', but when it gets broken down into issues that you care about, like petrol prices or asylum seekers — all these issues that are really important in politics, you think about it."

Betts explains how Act Now works to break down the barriers to involvement through a face-to-face model that asks the reader a sequence of important questions: What, when how and why?

"The first question people have is 'What? Convince me this is a problem'. So there are a few pages on sustainable energy resources, sweat shops, obesity — a whole range of things that are in the media and you know are kind of bad."

Betts is keen to emphasise that "action" doesn't necessarily involve chaining bodily parts to trees.

"It's called Act Now, but action is whatever's meaningful to you. Some people want to march in a protest, and other people want to give blood or make a donation, or they just want to talk to their friends about something other than *Big Brother*."

Jess Abramovich and a fellow intern decided to run a raffle fundraiser to help the women and children displaced by the Lebanon crisis. The two girls met with UNHCR, gave them an action plan, got certificates to fundraise and ended up raising \$700 towards the relief effort.

Abramovich reckons that before Act Now, she was one of those young people the media consistently decries as not knowing the difference between globalisation and global warming.

"I wrote an article called 'Why should Generation Why Try?' I pretty much said that before Act Now, go ahead and put me in that box of young people who don't care because I didn't care as much as I should have, because it all felt so daunting."

Betts believes that with a bit of faith, Generation Y will prove to be more resilient, more focused and more caring than the naysayers anticipate.

"The world's not perfect, but if we're going to blame anyone, we're blaming the wrong generation," she says bluntly.

WHAT: Act Now
WHERE: www.actnow.com.au

next day at the markets, where Hills walked the fine line between taking the piss out of the place, but not out of the people. "Well that is a thing you learn, having done stand-up for almost 17 years now, you learn how to have fun with people. People don't mind if you point out their faults as long as you have smile on your face," he says.

So what type of audience member are you? Do you like being pulled out of the crowd?

"No, I don't like being picked on [*laughs*]. That's for a number of reasons though. Firstly because I have to say to myself 'it's their show, don't take over, don't take over!', but also because I want to sit and watch a show. I saw a Joan Rivers show a few years back and I was sitting about five rows back and she started asking people what they did for a living, and I just sunk and went 'oh sweet Jesus!'. I knew if she came to me and I said 'I'm a stand-up comedian', that gives her nothing to work with. At least if I was a plumber or doctor it would be a place for her to go."

Couldn't you just lie? Do you think your audiences lie to you when you ask them what they do for a living onstage?

"I'd never lie about what I do. The weird thing is I think that other audience members know when someone lies. I've had experiences where people have said 'I'm a such and such', and then I've gone on and made jokes about it and asked them questions and there's just this weird tension in the room where nothing happens, and it's because the person has no back up. The might come up to me afterwards and come clean about it, but if they'd told the truth it would have been fine."

Are there some professions that are too embarrassing to be funny, though? What if I told you I've worked as a Librarian?

"Well my training would be to try and work out how that could elevate you. While I'm not exactly sure how that could be [Hills takes a long pause as my little librarian heart sinks]; I guess I could ask if you have an overriding urge to 'ssshhhhh' me? Or if you were sitting with your boyfriend I'd ask if when you go home do you take off your turtle-neck, glasses and bun and automatically become a naughty librarian? See, getting you on side and still getting the funny."

What if I said the answer is 'yes' to both of those?
"Great. Then we'd be off and running."

What: *Adam Hills Live in the Suburbs* DVD [Roadshow/ABC]

THIS WEEKEND IS THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE CRONULLA RIOTS, AN EVENT THAT PUT THE SUTHERLAND SHIRE ON THE INTERNATIONAL MAP AND SHOCKED ALL AUSTRALIANS. **JAMELLE WELLS** LOOKS AT THE PROJECT BY **BIG HART**, A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM SUTHERLAND WHO ARE TRYING TO CHANGE ATTITUDES.

FLOATING DREAMS

AS THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE CRONULLA RIOTS approach, the world is still waiting to see what will happen. But arts and social change company Big hART has taken the approach that it's harder to hurt someone when you know their story. So they've brought together young people from the area, photographers, filmmakers, composers, older residents, shipwrights and local business owners, to record each other's stories and create a strong picture of life in the Sutherland Shire. The result is a floating multimedia work *Junk Theory*.

Big hART's Scott Rankin says last December, many lifestyles and cultures became 'junk' or something to be thrown away and the project shows the rest of Sydney that harmony has to be built on understanding, which comes from knowing each other's story.

He says at dusk for the next month or so a Chinese Junk will glide past residents and Sydney Festival goes around the foreshores of Port Hacking, Botany Bay, Sydney Harbour and Pittwater. Projected onto its sails will be portraits, films and images of people who live in Sutherland and taken by people who live there. Music and sound scapes will waft from the vessel's decks.

Rankin says the idea for the project came about after a function he was at with Deputy Premier, John Watkins. "I asked John what the government was going to do about it all and he had no immediate response. That's understandable because as Australia's first major cultural confrontation since Captain Cook landed in Botany Bay, the riots took everyone by surprise. Then we started talking about the possibility of changing attitudes and creating a cultural shift."

Big hART worked with the idea that the waterfront is where a lot of people with upwardly mobile aspirations live and they thought it would be interesting for them to see a ghost ship of harmony floating past.

"The young people involved are from very different backgrounds and some of them had the attitude



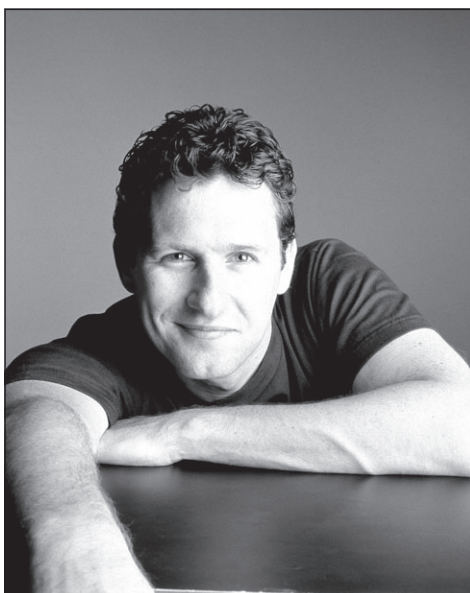
'what's this fuckin bullshit', but we've seen that shift."

Big hART company member, Michelle Kotevski, who grew up in the Sutherland shire, agrees. "Getting these people together has been a slow process but their tolerance of each other has completely changed. We've done things like take a production crew into the home of one of the participants, a Sudanese girl who has nine siblings. By talking to her family, the other kids learned about her journey out of Sudan and the plight of Kenyan refugees. The project's involved around 100 people and it's already making a difference."

The Big hART company was founded 14 years ago by commercial artists driven by a need to help communities in crisis. They have another seven projects on the boil across Australia, including one inspired by the drought in Griffith, another by the destruction of indigenous languages in Alice Springs and one inspired by single mothers in Tasmania.

Big hART also helped the Northcott housing estate in Surry Hills achieve international recognition through last year's Sydney Festival show, *Stickybricks*. The estate was notorious for crime, drug problems and a high suicide rate, but the show encouraged residents to unite to tackle those problems. Northcott recently became the first public housing estate in the world to achieve World Health Organisation recognition as a safe community.

WHAT: *Junk Theory*
WHEN & WHERE: Tuesday 5 — 21 December, Bundeena to Botany Bay; Saturday 6 — 26 January, Sydney Harbour to Pittwater; Moored: Saturday 6 Jubilee Park, Glebe; Friday 12, Lavender Bay, Milsons Point; Saturday 13, Woolwich Dock, Clarke Road, Woolwich; Thursday 25, Fairlight Bay, Manly



ADAM HILLS IS NICE, REALLY NICE. AND THIS DOESN'T MEAN BLAND OR UNINTERESTING, BUT RATHER GENEROUS AND UNUSUALLY HAPPY. THIS IS PRETTY UNCOMMON IN COMEDY, A PROFESSION THAT OFTEN FAVOURS BITCHING ABOVE ALL OTHER PASTIMES. LIZ GIUFFRÉ GOT SOME TRICKS OF THE TRADE BETWEEN GIGS FROM LONDON.

ROCKIN' THE SUBURBS

ALTHOUGH WE KNOW HIM BEST AS HOST OF *SPICKS AND SPECKS*, Adam Hills' stand-up is held in high regard in the UK. The poms have even put him up for awards (three times bridesmaid for the Perrier, among others), accolades that draw him back to live there regularly for months on end. While *Spicks and Specks* and the weather are certainly sweeteners to keep Hills coming home, if his DVD is to be believed, there is something about the Australian suburbs that Hills finds particularly appealing as well.

His debut stand-up DVD was filmed in Pakenham, just outside Melbourne, and Hills seems to have loved every minute of it. Particularly funny are his interactions with the locals both onstage and the

An Exciting Announcement! Guaranteed to Amuse

TRIPOD

SONGS FROM SELF SAUCING

MUSICAL

A NEW WORK IN THE MODERN CD FORMAT CONTAINING TEN COMIC SONGS

HILARIOUS

Recorded in High Fidelity at the Hi-Fi Bar and Ballroom, Melbourne, Australia in April 2006

From Their Hit Live Show "Self-Saucing" With Songs and Wit in Three-Part Harmony

"They write proper songs, they put proper jokes into them, and they perform them with classy style."

- CHORTLE.CO.UK

available where quality music is sold

FURTHER INVESTIGATION CAN BE UNDERTAKEN AT:

www.3pod.com.au

- THE HERALD-SUN