



*Alice Pickles, Krista Harbatniuk, Emily Boehm and Emily Richards-Jones. Photo: Andrew Perryman*

## Mentor At Hand by Megan Spencer (c) 2011

First published in [Bendigo Weekly](#), July 1, 2011

Hallelujah! Mentoring is having a resurgence!

Increasingly we hear about – or see on our (reality) TV screens - cultural, sporting or professional development programs where ‘profile’ people or ‘celebrities’ are enlisted as mentors, in order to give folk opportunities which otherwise wouldn’t come a-knocking.

I found a definition of mentoring that I really like: “A mentor is an individual, usually older, always more experienced, who helps and guides another individual’s development. This guidance is not done for personal gain” (about.com)

The key is at the end: mentoring is a shared relationship where an exchange occurs. It’s not simply ‘teaching’ or a one-way street with one imparting information to another from ‘on high’.

The ‘x-factor’ is experience. Mentoring requires someone to share not just what they have learned within a particular field; it asks them to give the context in which they learned it.

Mistakes and secrets. That kind of knowledge – giving someone the benefit of lived experience – is liquid gold. It gives people insight and thus a chance to evolve.

And the mentee too shares new perspectives with the mentor. The ‘old dog’ gets to learn new tricks – ‘two-ways learning’ as it is sometimes called.

I was really happy to hear about the [Next On Now](#) “young artists mentoring program” which aims to assist 30 artists aged 17 to 25 in the Central Victoria region.

Krista Horbatiuk is the coordinator of the project, funded by the Australia Council and other arts agencies, via local arts incubator, Punctum.



A Castlemaine transplant (via Sydney and Canada), Krista has kept her ear to the ground to discover the needs of local emerging artists who are studying at Bendigo TAFE, Bendigo Senior Secondary College and La Trobe University, and other institutions.

The aim is to develop a comprehensive mentoring program to pair five practising artists (in their 20s), with thirty young artists, then to produce ten distinct projects.

This will culminate in a weekend-long festival and exhibition called 'Art Blast', February 25 & 26, 2012.

The plan is for it to occupy Bendigo's historic Beehive Mining Exchange located above Allan's Walk, currently under restoration.

Heads are already buzzing with the possibilities...

The artists will create work in each room under the guidance of an assigned mentor. "Each project will take around three months to develop, with around 40 hours of mentorship involved," Krista tells me.

"Young artists – let alone young regional artists – don't always get professional practise opportunities. "Next On Now - and Art Blast - is an opportunity to get a public presentation and learn from professionals who practise all the time. You don't always get that in school."

Krista is also offering further networking opportunities to the participating artists through Punctum's evolving network of regional artists.

While most of the mentors are confirmed – including ex-BSSC graduate Brett Ludemman – so far only three young Bendigo artists have signed on.

"Everything!" Krista beams at me when I ask what kind of artists are eligible to apply. "Performance artists, visual artists, musicians, sound artists, multimedia artists, writers – and we want to get them involved in all aspects of the production too, not just the work."

A blog has been set up for artists to contribute to, and more male mentors are being sought.

While I've always valued the idea of mentoring – and have mentored a number of times myself – it's an opportunity that ultimately eluded me when I was 'coming up'. One that might have saved me some hard yards had I found the right person.

Next On Now sounds like a good deal to me, and one you'd have to fight tooth and nail for if you lived in the city...

(c) Megan Spencer 2011.