

# Infusing an artistic mode of practice into the workplace



Victorian Workplace  
Mental Wellbeing  
*Collaboration*

## Regional Arts Victoria

Regional Arts Victoria is a small organisation that has taken big strides in promoting – and achieving – higher levels of mental wellbeing.

Founded in 1969, Regional Arts Victoria is the leading not-for-profit organisation for regional artists and arts companies in Victoria. They currently have 20 employees, including four based regionally.

The majority of employees are artists and people who are passionate about art. Recognising that creative work is a meaningful part of their employees' sense of identity and overall wellbeing, RAV have infused an artistic mode of practice into their workplace.

### Tailoring initiatives... what's important to the workforce?

Regional Arts Victoria is 'walking the talk' by nurturing and celebrating art through a series of innovative initiatives that recognise their workplace as an important place where art is made, shared, experienced, discussed and developed.

#### Quiet Fridays

Quiet Fridays were implemented in 2015 to allow Regional Arts Victoria's full-time employees to work their weekly hours over four days (Monday to Thursday) instead of five days. Staff then devote Fridays to their own practice and the development of creative work. Approximately two-thirds (66 per cent) of Regional Arts Victoria's workforce currently take up this option.

#### Staff salons

Fortnightly half-hour 'staff salons' are focused discussions on current ideas in artistic practice. Staff take turns in facilitating a salon on a topic of their passion or concern. This ensures that the critical discussion of art is infused into the organisation's work, which is both valued by and meaningful to Regional Arts Victoria and its employees.

*"Artists by nature are driven by what they love and identify with. They take huge risks in expressing themselves through their work – and that is the most insidious and dangerous form of vulnerability."*

- Esther Anatolitis, Director, Regional Arts Victoria

#### Creative professional development retreat

Regional Arts Victoria has an annual three-day retreat combining a focus on developing both 'hard' workplace skills and 'softer' skills such as emotional intelligence and mindfulness, alongside opportunities for employees to collaborate on creative projects.

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While Regional Arts Victoria strives to deliver initiatives that are tailored to its unique workforce and staff needs, Regional Arts Victoria is mindful that because employees are so passionate about their work, they can be prone to self-exploitation and burnout. As such, Regional Arts Victoria implements a number of initiatives to ensure staff wellbeing, such as:

- **Supportive structures** – including an Employee Assistance Program
- **Skill development** – with mental health first aid training
- **Technology** – using Yammer, a social networking platform, to facilitate employee communication, particularly for those who are based regionally or spend time out of the office.

### What is the impact for Regional Arts Victoria?

Although there are not yet specific measures in place, Regional Arts Victoria staff have reported improvements in mental health and wellbeing over recent years, noting developments in employee morale and lower staff turnover.

“I dedicate time to quietening my spinning thoughts, to reflect, rest and clarify. Dedication is important – it takes practice and commitment. I draw breath, making and tending a garden, playing, being in nature, and letting my thoughts wander – making space. To delve into photography in nature is a small, quiet and very private joy right now. I’m writing, reading and seeing work that inspires and stretches me, which enhances my professional life and in turn leads to balance and calm.”

- Suzi Cordell, Education & Families Manager, Regional Arts Victoria

### What works?

#### Drawing on what is important and meaningful to the organisation and workforce to promote wellbeing

Regional Arts Victoria’s core business is to ‘inspire art across the state’. In an organisation where the majority of employees are artists, creative practices are essential to mental wellbeing and self-identity. This is reflected in Regional Arts Victoria’s approach to employee wellbeing, which focuses on infusing an artistic mode of practice into the workplace.

[www.rav.net.au](http://www.rav.net.au)

The Victorian Workplace Mental Wellbeing Collaboration is a partnership between SuperFriend, VicHealth and WorkSafe Victoria. We are working together to help workplaces create positive and supportive work cultures and environments by focusing on organisational leadership and encouraging workplaces to implement positive mental wellbeing strategies that enhance existing policies and processes.

For more information, please visit:

[www.leadingwellvic.com.au](http://www.leadingwellvic.com.au)

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