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Narara Valley High School School and Community Music Program receives national recognition for impact on community wellbeing

Narara Valley High School School and Community Music program has been named one of 24 national finalists in the second annual Music in Communities Awards.

Its selection, from entries across Australia, brings it one step closer to a share of the \$20,000 prize pool in the Awards, run by 'Music. Play for Life', the Music Council of Australia's national music advocacy campaign.

This year, the Awards are themed around wellbeing, to find local music groups and programs whose benefits extend way beyond the music.

"Active involvement in music and singing groups brings all sorts of flow-on benefits beyond the pleasure of the music itself," says Awards convenor, Tina Broad, of the Music Council of Australia. "We know it can help counteract many negative aspects of modern life such as alienation, isolation and depression, by promoting mental health and physical well-being. It can help people feel better connected and it can drive a strong sense of community spirit. Our 2009 finalists are powerful examples."

This year's finalists include:

- A rural community in South Australia which has uses a local shearing shed as a some-time Music Hall, creating a social and musical hub for farming families and neighbours.
- An outer Sydney suburban town band, now run by the grandson of the original bandmaster, which creates opportunities for very young players and much older musicians to play together across generations.
- A primary school choir in regional Victoria which has joined forces with a local seniors choir. Together they rehearse once a week and do road trips together, forming strong bonds between young and old which transcend music.
- An inner city women's choir in Melbourne using music and singing as vehicles for social justice and reconciliation.
- An innovative program for people with disabilities which puts a new twist on the concept of an 'orchestra'.

Despite pockets of activity, on the whole Australia has proportionally fewer active music makers compared with other Western nations such as the US and the UK. Household surveys show there are an estimated 5 million 'lapsed' musicians – people who once learned, but no longer play.

"One of the great things about community music groups and choirs is that they can provide a 'safe' way for people to reengage with music and, importantly, with other people."

All the details are online at www.musicincommunities.org.au, including details of last year's Awards winners.

The 2009 National winners will be announced in December.