

The arts driving social inclusion

The arts, and specifically community and cultural development programs, are proven tools for driving positive social change and supporting community wellbeing, writes **Ivana Jirasek**, Coordinator of Artsupport Australia.



The transformation of dysfunctional communities through the intervention of arts practices

such as theatre, music, singing (consider the recent growth in community choirs), dance, writing, painting, photography, video and multi-media is well documented. The reported benefits are many for both participants and the wider community – with social inclusion high on the list.

Many social groups suffer isolation and discrimination through systemic and long-term situational and institutional disadvantage – consider the disabled, the aged, Indigenous, youth-at-risk, unemployed and those in regional and remote Australia. The Australia Council for the Arts has supported community and cultural development (CACD) programs over four decades to build healthy community engagement, and confers an annual Ros Bower Award for excellence in the field.

Artsupport Australia works with hundreds of arts organisations nationally, many of whom provide effective programs to address a diversity of social needs. It helps them build their philanthropic income and equally works with many philanthropists, trusts and foundations



A child participating in an ArtStories program. Photo: Catherine Threlfall.

to source projects that meet their specific areas of interest. Artsupport Australia provides mentorship, advice or referrals – all as a free service. Some of its clients include:

ArtStories

In 2003, Darwin-based music therapist Anja Tait formalised the long-term development of ArtStories, an arts-based model – using music, songs, visual arts and storytelling to teach language and literacy. An early three-year grant from the Westpac Foundation; enabled the innovative multi-lingual and inter-generational approach to be trialled at remote and regional communities of Northern Territory. This included the Numbulwar Community Education Centre, an Indigenous learning hub with over 200 students, for many of whom English is a third language. ArtStories' success led to the support of government and institutional partners, including the Northern Territory Library, which has embraced the program and its capacity for national and international application.

Australian Centre for Photography

The Matana Foundation for Young People has supported the Australian Centre for Photography (ACP) to pilot a program for marginalised youth from wider Sydney. Run in partnership with Oasis Youth Support Network, the program involves training small groups of young people in photography and personal development in bi-weekly sessions over 10 weeks. It will culminate in a group exhibition at the Centre's gallery during the peak visiting period prior to Christmas – marking a personal and public rite-of-passage. The photographic medium is a very liberating tool, with vast social reach enabled by digital technologies. The program's ability to grow participants' creative and commercial potential as well as social engagement brings a very powerful community benefit.

Tutti Ensemble

Adelaide-based Tutti Ensemble has received international acclaim for integrating artistic excellence and social inclusion. It provides unique

training, services and opportunities for South Australian school leavers with disabilities in music, drama visual arts and digital design. Its programs include Tutti Kids, a music and drama program for disabled children two to 12 years age, to build early concentration and social skills to support achievement and independence in later years. The Macquarie Group Foundation has supported Digitech, a film-making and animation program devised to develop important skills for young adults in digital communication to enable greater social exchange and connectedness. Sellout performances at the 2009 Adelaide Fringe for 'The Shouting Fence', a choral collaboration with the State Opera of South Australia, had a cast of 150 ranging from five to 85 years of age, including about 60 per cent with disabilities.

Philanthropy is a crucial source of income for these organisations, and Artsupport Australia is on side helping develop their individual donor programs, and bringing them to the awareness of appropriate philanthropists and foundations. ■

Artsupport Australia is an initiative of the Australia Council for the Arts to grow cultural philanthropy
www.australiacouncil.gov.au/philanthropy

Useful references

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