



YOUNG PEOPLE, RURAL PLACES AND THE DESIRE TO MAKE A CHANGE

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Abstract: *Being involved in theatre, front of house management and a full time customer service role at the local council I am exposed to many thoughts and concerns from young people in the arts. What can I do to change and create a positive social change in the arts? The issue isn't obtaining funds to deliver programs, the issue is having a permanent team to ensure that these programs are delivered. Is it possible to have a working relationship with a city based arts organisation? What can 'we' as funding bodies do to make this happen?*

Keywords: Young people, rural communities, regenerating community, arts, change.

Karratha, Western Australia. Where's that?! - I hear you ask. Located in the north west of Western Australia, Karratha is home to approximately 15,000 people and some of the biggest oil and gas mines in the world. So how does that tie in with positive social change, young people and the arts? Let me enlighten you.

My name is Brittany Moxham and I am a 21 year old residing in Karratha. I was born and raised in the Pilbara and went to boarding school in the 'big smoke' Perth. After travelling Europe and the USA for two years, I have come back to my 'roots' to try and settle down and dare I say it, make a difference in the arts. I have been heavily involved with the Karratha Youth Theatre (a not for profit theatre organisation) beginning in an administrative, project officer role with some performance delivery and have recently moved into the position of musical director / producer. I also work with the Walkington Theatre in a front of house management capacity on a casual basis which allows me to meet people from many different theatre companies and walks of life. Don't let me forget to mention that I also work full time for the local Council in a customer service role.

Having said all this, there are many issues that we face on a daily basis and the question is constantly being asked – what can we do to create a positive social change through the arts? In our region, a lot of the population is made up by fly in-fly out workers, meaning that the permanent number of residents is decreasing. With a lot of funding bodies and opportunities in the north west of WA, the issue isn't obtaining funds to deliver programs/workshops, the issue is having a permanent team of people to ensure that these programs are delivered to the best of their ability. How do we fix this? How do we create a permanent positive influence and change when the population is ever changing?

Is it possible to create some kind of working relationship with a city based arts organisation? For example, having workshops and opportunities for young people to be involved in projects

in rural areas but organising them from a city based office where resources and contacts are easier to access.

Being a young person in a rural community trying to deliver arts programs, it is often frustrating when people wanting to become involved in the arts are reserved due to stereotypes that have arisen for many different reasons. How do we get around the stereotype that young people from rural areas are not as gifted and talented as those in the city areas. Many young people I have worked with think that they are not good enough simply because of their location. How do we get them involved so that they know that it is OK to be involved and not 'uncool'? This may sound like an unimportant factor but a large part of the way young people act is related to this attitude. How can we instil positive change and attitude?

Are we able to work with established artists who are highly regarded by the community and don't have the stigma associated with them that making a difference, getting involved and thinking positively about the arts is not 'cool'? Can we create programs and workshops that young people can attend to explore themselves and learn that it is ok to have a go and want to be involved in arts activities? I have delivered many drama workshops to the younger community and the growth in confidence and sense of self can only be described as remarkable. Is there a way that we can have this effect on the whole community, especially young people?

We talk a lot about wanting young people and people of all ages to feel comfortable expressing themselves through the arts, but the question has to be asked: Where are we supposed to express ourselves when there is nowhere to do it? This brings me to my next point. Lack of public space and facilities is a prominent fixture in the comments and concerns of our young people and also our arts professionals. We cannot blame a lack of funding support because there is always ample funding to be received, so who is responsible? Is it the arts professionals in the community? Is it the frustrated parents? Is it the council workers? Can one person or group of people be responsible? How can we be sure that we are giving people what they want? Having a suitable facility is essential in arts delivery. In Karratha, we are fortunate to have a very passionate Theatre Manager who embraces many projects and people who have a vision to have a positive impact on our community. Having said all this, we are only talking about one form of art, theatre and performance. What about artworks and musicians, graphic designers?

What can 'we' as funding bodies or council workers do to make this happen? Establish some kind of organisation / board of arts coordinators / young people who get together once a month to discuss the needs of the community and what people are searching for? Making the organisation well known and welcoming so that no one misses out on the opportunity to be heard because, at the end of the day – we want to hear you and you need to be heard. There can be no wrong answers if we are all working together to create a positive community.

Another issue that we are facing currently (very specific to the Pilbara Region) is that of the mentality of the people who are currently occupying our community. Due to the industries that are very prominent in this region of Australia we have a lot of 'fly in-fly out' workers who come to town, conduct their work and leave again, taking up a lot of the housing, local jobs and having quite a large impact on the permanent residents of the community. How can we get these workers interested in our community and willing to make a positive impact? How can we get these workers to support our local artists and help them to receive the recognition they deserve?

Creative processes mobilizing communities for positive social change, such a broad and loaded statement that may take us years to identify exactly what this means and how we get it right. In the meantime, we need to work at it and keep identifying the problems that we are faced with and what we can do to make sure things are being addressed.

As a young person living in a rural community, working in a council role and having a passion for the arts, I often ask myself what I am doing spending my time in a place like this when I could be living in Melbourne where the opportunities are endless and the facilities state of the art? But then I think about the young people that I get to work with and the relationships that I get to develop, the changes that I get to see in young people and know that I have been a part of that positive change.

All of these things are so very important to me and I hope one day, someone comes along with as much passion and drive to carry on the vision that I have for our small town and the arts. Someone that I know exists because I have been fortunate enough to work on some level with a great handful of influential people in our community, people working towards positive change and the regeneration of our community.

Thank you.

Biography:

*Brittany Moxham says; Rural Western Australia isn't the easiest place to run and direct a youth theatre organisation. However, having worked all around the world in all different capacities rural WA is by far the most interesting to me. Having performed all over the country as a young dancer / performer, my heart lies in the theatre. After being named the Australian Student of the Year in 2005, I travelled to the Unites States to undertake the role of a Performing Arts Director at a disabilities organisation. After two years, I came home to work with the Divisional Headquarters of the Salvation Army implementing positive programs for troubled young people. Love landed me back in Karratha, Western Australia where I now work for the local council, direct the Karratha Youth Theatre, am finishing a teaching degree by correspondence and work closely with Country Arts WA in a funding panel capacity.
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