

Case study

Empire Theatre Projects Company

Details

What:

Empire Theatre Projects Company formed in 2009 as part of Empire Theatre in Toowoomba, to provide outstanding arts experiences in southern regional Queensland.

With Arts Queensland funding, a Youth and Community Engagement Facilitator was employed to develop and implement a program of activities in 2014.

Examples of activities included:

- IMPACT Ensemble program to train young artists in skills such as writing, directing, stage craft and stage management
- Workshops for young people in Toowoomba and other nearby regions
- Activities to engage the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, connected with a performance by Chooky Dancers
- Engagement with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds at Harristown State High School
- Production of a new creative work, *twelve2twentyfive*, focused on rural mental health.

When:

2014

Where:

Toowoomba, St George, Charleville, Dalby, Lockyer Valley



2014 Impact Ensemble. Credit: Ari Palani.

Key stats:

- 5 productions
- 1956 attendees and participants
- 42 artists engaged in paid work

Arts Queensland contribution:

\$60,000 – Projects and Programs Fund

Contact for further information:

Name: Jeanette Wedmaier

Email: jeanette@empiretheatre.com.au

Phone: (07) 4698 9925

Website: www.empiretheatre.com.au

Outcomes

- IMPACT Ensemble was invited to tour its production about relationships between teenagers and parents, *Talking to Brickwalls*, to the 2high Youth Arts Festival in Brisbane in 2015.
- Three members of IMPACT Ensemble who graduated from year 12 in 2014 have been accepted into tertiary creative arts courses. Members also received the Queensland Theatre Company Young Playwrights Award in 2014.
- The company expanded its reach and reputation beyond traditional geographic boundaries through workshop programs in St George and Charleville.
- New groups were engaged including the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and newly arrived migrants. This work will see further outcomes in 2015, including development of an Indigenous Engagement Strategy and a performance project in collaboration with local culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- New arts and health partnerships were developed through production of *twelve2twentyfive*, developed with the Medicare Local team for presentation to medical practitioners at a wellbeing conference. The production has attracted private funding to be presented in schools.
- The Youth and Community Engagement Facilitator has been retained by the company on a full-time basis due to positive outcomes achieved.



twelve2twentyfive cast. Credit: Ari Palani.

Learnings and reflections

The company shared the following tips and reflections about project management, the challenges of community engagement and the importance of demand driven practice:

"So many additional projects were added in the calendar for 2014 than originally planned. In 2015 the calendar is being much more scrutinised to ensure that the resources of the company can withstand the demand – quality over quantity and a higher focus on time and project management to ensure available resources."

"There is a massive trend towards community engagement projects and opportunities. We did three projects of this nature with varying scale and success. Companies need to be mindful of the real impact it will have and to not have over-ambitious expectations of the outcome in terms of translating into ticket sales. There is often a significant additional administrative strain placed on the venue to help coordinate these projects effectively. A tip for production companies thinking of doing these projects is don't take the community members or venues you are engaging for granted. They are doing you a favour and giving up their time for free and you need them as much as they need you."

"At all times we try to be responsive and adaptable in our programming. We are still testing new projects, products and theories and if through consultation something isn't working or another priority arises, it is prudent to listen to your audience."

"It is important to remain open, accessible, relevant and to take the time to foster relationships within the community. I have found the best projects have come from identifying real need in consultation with the community you wish to engage as opposed to arm's length programming that involves more assumption and less conversation."