

Linking young people with mentors in the arts over a period of time creates a strong connection for that young person to their own community and fosters their ability to realise and achieve their personal goals.

Once such project, which has created significant impact on young peoples' lives in the Northern Rivers, is the Homebase Mentorship Program run last year by NORPA Dance Action with support from the Regional Arts Fund.



by BERNADETTE GARDINER

WE STARTED BY TARGETING 18 YOUNG PEOPLE FROM AROUND THE region, particularly in areas where there was seen to be a lack of connection to the arts. Over a period of eight months these young people were given the opportunity to be mentored by local dance artists, Daniella Finkenauer, Jason Campbell and Ryan Dillon. The mentorees developed their own dance projects in their communities as well as coming to Lismore three times throughout the year for more intensive mentoring. The mentors also went out to visit the mentorees in their home communities.

Eight months for young people can be a huge commitment, however keeping young people engaged in the mentoring process over an extended period of time resulted in some great outcomes, such as: running dance classes, holding workshops and performing at festivals, getting paid gigs and continuing study.

The energy and transformation that arose for some of these young people during the mentorship was very inspiring and rewarding for all involved to witness, resulting in organisations in the local areas keen to continue to support these young people, even now that the mentorship has ended.

One such transformation was evident in Tahnee Arnold from Tenterfield, "I didn't really want to finish school. I was going to drop out as soon as I could. I was feeling really quite low before Homebase started. Being involved in this program has turned everything around for me, it reminded me of how much I love dance and how I always wanted to be a performer. I'm now staying on to do my HSC and at present am doing dance as an extra at school for my School Certificate."

All mentorees achieved their goals, James from Byron Bay is continuing to use the mentorship to develop in becoming a teacher of dance, "I've met heaps of new people and it's taught me how to set goals and achieve them. Now I teach classes in Mullumbimby twice a week".

Homebase also gave the mentors, who had once been mentored themselves, an opportunity to grow as individuals by sharing valuable knowledge and offering support to young people. Daniella Finkenauer, Homebase Mentor: "Having been not so long ago a mentoree myself, I saw the avalanche effect not only in my artistic process and CCD work but amazingly at the speed with which I found myself now a mentor to the new up-and-coming hip hop generation. I've been mostly surprised at how Homebase has inspired these young people to stand on their own, especially benefiting the ones that were touch-and-go at the start of the project, who have come through the other side proud and having totally integrated what Homebase had to offer." ■

homebase



Homebase workshop at Yamba
Photo courtesy Daily Examiner

Bernadette Gardiner is the newly-appointed Outreach Coordinator at Northern Rivers Performing Arts' Dance Action

The Regional Arts Fund is an Australian Government initiative to support the arts in regional, remote and isolated Australia.



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