



Caring for the future growing up today

Voices of the Wheatbelt: Wheat Beats

Community Arts Network Western Australia

The Voices of the Wheatbelt project is a large community arts initiative of the Community Arts Network of Western Australia (CAN WA). Voices of the Wheatbelt was developed to create an opportunity for the community to explore and express their sense of belonging, to discover or reconnect with each other, their families, community and the environment.



Young participants from Wheatbelt communities express themselves through hip-hop

Wheats Beats was phase three of Voices of the Wheatbelt.

The aim behind Wheat Beats was to encourage young people to express their sense of place and belonging within their communities through the creation of an original hip-hop song about their towns, with an accompanying music video clip.



Deciding

A successful pilot hip-hop song writing workshop was held in Narrogin and a community meeting was held asking people what types of projects and art forms they most wanted to be involved in.

For young people, the most popular art form was hip-hop workshops. CAN WA built on these ideas to create a series of hip-hop music and dance, traditional Aboriginal dance and storytelling, and filmmaking workshops to create original songs with the young people, with corresponding music clips and dance performances.



Narrogin group learning traditional dance from facilitator Olman Walley

Nicola Davison was the coordinator for the project. Olman Walley, respected Aboriginal dancer and musician, was brought on board to teach participants Noongar history, and skills in traditional dance. This was complemented by Nelle Hokianga teaching hip-hop dancing skills that used traditional dance moves.

Following discussions with Scott Griffiths ('Optamus' from local hip-hop outfit Downsyde, and the music facilitator for the project), local young filmmaker Mat de Koning was enlisted to teach filmmaking and photography, and film the music videos to accompany each song.

Through this group of professional community artists, the young participants were able to be involved in all aspects of the creation of a hip-hop song, dance, and music clip.

Preparing

CAN WA built on their relationship with four schools in the region, and approached the principals of Kellerberrin, Quairading, Brookton and the manager of the Narrogin Residential College to involve their students in the program. Speaking directly with the principals in each regional school ensured that support and follow up was available. For example, participants did not have to worry about transport, skill level or time away from other extra-curricular activities.

The partnerships developed with the schools allowed CAN WA to correctly tailor and develop the project to the needs of the young people, ensuring there would be something for everyone, depending on their personal interests.

Doing it

Workshops covering hip-hop, song writing and filmmaking were run in Quairading, Kellerberrin, Brookton and Narrogin, with more than 120 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and young people aged 11 to 15 years of age participating.

Good project planning ensured the 'right' artists were chosen and minimal adaptations were required once the project started. However, artist facilitators were open, flexible and accommodated suggestions by young participants, when appropriate.

The young people engaged readily because the workshops were fun and everyone could participate. Each group delivered a high quality music/video clip. Working with artists who were successful in their own fields also provided positive examples of the possibilities of pursuing a career in the arts.

Apart from the fun and skills developed from the actual workshops, the main outcome that made the project rewarding for the participants was the creation of a hip-hop song and video clip, showcased in a DVD which included a 30 minute behind-the-scenes documentary.

A copy of the DVD was provided to each participant at the two launches – one in Narrogin, and the other in Fremantle – at the conclusion of the project.

Following up

At the conclusion of the workshop series in each school and community, feedback was sought from the young participants, teachers, principals and staff members who were involved with the project.

Additionally, a short documentary was created on the process, which included interviews and opinions from the facilitators, school staff, community members and participants.

The young people said they had learnt:

Specific skills

- How to make music and rap, learned about Aboriginal stories, didgeridoo, dancing, singing, filmmaking, rhyming.

Self-esteem/interpersonal skills

- More confidence in public speaking, cooperation, not to be shy, friendship, courage, appreciation, teamwork, sharing, talking things through, self-expression, leadership.



School related (taken from the facilitator's report)

- Lyric writing, computer work, making music, career knowledge, choreography, fitness, digital media, vocabulary, critical listening, writing, Australian history, technology.

Since the completion of the DVD, further successes of the project include:

- Live performance at Keela Dreaming Cultural Festival, March 2011, with backing by Optamus.



Daniel Watkins performing the Brookton DHS song 'Brookton (We Represent)' at the Keela Dreaming Cultural Festival, alongside Optamus

- Raymond Storey from the Narrogin group was invited by Scott Griffiths to perform with him at the Too Solid Festival, Supreme Court Gardens, January 2011.
- The music clips by Brookton and Narrogin played at FTI's Deadly Yarns screening.
- The DVDs were featured in The West Australian's Wheatbelt lift out special.
- The music clips and documentary were picked up by National Indigenous Television to screen for an unlimited number of runs over three years, and can be seen at <http://vimeo.com/album/1754789>
- A follow up career day was organised in Narrogin for participants and other young people interested in music. CAN WA invited Scott Griffiths (artist) and Scott Adam (Music Business lecturer at Leederville TAFE) to speak about how to create a career in the music industry.
- Several of the original participants are continuing to write their own songs, and have been invited to perform at local festivals and events.
- The project was invited to be showcased at several arts industry events.
- The DVD has been used as a teaching resource in both metropolitan and regional based educational institutes, from primary schools to tertiary institutions.