

MEDIA RELEASE

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Keeping country communities alive and active through dance

In the town of Ravensthorpe, and surrounding communities, dance is helping to ignite the creative spark in people of all ages - especially children.

This unique project, being delivered by the Ravensthorpe Regional Arts Council, has given every child in their communities access to dance through their local schools. They are bringing dance and new opportunities for participation and learning to the region, with extremely positive results.

May we have this dance? is a contemporary dance and performance collaboration funded by Country Arts WA's Regional Arts Partnership Program (RAPP). This is one of three dance programs, being coordinated by Ausdance WA, with sister projects underway in Peel and Great Southern.

Around 300 students from Ravensthorpe, Hopetoun, Jerramungup, Jerdacuttup, Munglinup and Lake King are taking part in the program and loving it!

Ainsley Foulds, Chair of Ravensthorpe Regional Arts Council, said the opportunity to take part in regular dance classes had been an extremely positive experience for local children with multiple benefits.

"Dance allows these children to engage their creative minds and imagination and express themselves. It is also a great form of active exercise – so good for the body and mind.

"We have been blown away with the feedback we have received from the children. They feel more confident, they feel free and happy and something we didn't expect, the boys and particularly the teenage boys said they felt calmer after participating in dance."

Ms Foulds said the great success of the program was its sustainability and potential to be applied to other regions and art forms.

"We are very excited about what we have been able to create and deliver. Not only does every child at school now have access to dance, we are empowering locals. What makes the project sustainable is the mentees. We are training and developing local people with an interest in dance or with an arts background to become dance teachers so that they can continue to deliver opportunities for dance performance and participation in their local area," Ms Foulds said.

"It's been such a great success in our region, we believe that our project template can be applied and rolled out to other remote areas not only to deliver dance programs like this one, but other art forms as well."

Ms Foulds said the council had been working to create a sustainable dance program in the region for more than a decade.

“Isolation and distance are real challenges. The closest dance studio to Ravensthorpe is at Esperance and that is a 400km round trip.

“Our visiting dance teachers clock up 740kms in a week visiting all the local schools in the program, some of which are tiny with fewer than 20 students.

“That is why for any dance program to work in the long term, it has to be sustainable and develop the skills of people on the ground so that they can go out and teach dance in their local area and within their local schools,” she said.

Ausdance WA Director Gabrielle Sullivan said the benefits of the partnerships formed with regional arts organisations such as Ravensthorpe Regional Arts Council were significant.

“We are developing support networks for dance artists and arts workers across the regions and potentially developing a number of models for increasing access to dance programs that can be transferred to other regions across the state. That would be a wonderful legacy of the diverse projects that are currently being run through the RAPP.”

Regional Arts Partnership Program (RAPP)

The Regional Arts Partnership Program (RAPP) was launched in October 2016 and is delivered by Country Arts WA, on behalf of the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries and the Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development, under the State Government’s Creative Regions investment into arts and culture across WA.

RAPP brings local regional artists and organisations together with leading WA arts bodies and providers to create, resource and run new and creative arts projects – in a way that has not been done before.

Country Arts WA Executive Director Paul MacPhail said the program revolutionised the way arts funding was distributed to the regions.

“This innovative new framework allows arts organisations and individuals to become the drivers of regional arts decision making and work with a much bigger budget and far better allocation of resources.”

“It also gives these individuals and organisations the capacity and opportunity to tap into the wealth of accumulated talent and skills available across the arts in WA in a way they have not previously been able to do.”

“In addition, it is a highly effective vehicle for the creation of more job opportunities, more art projects and performances, as well as more support for regional art and artists and a more enlivened and sustainable regional arts sector as a result.”

Mr MacPhail said *May we have this dance?* was one of the first three projects to receive RAPP funding of \$200,000 each for the creation and delivery of their initiatives.

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