

Disadvantaged youth take the Next Step

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The SnapHop Rotary Youth Arts Project demonstrates that building quality arts experiences for young people can change lives.



Dancehouse, in Melbourne's inner northern suburb of Carlton, doesn't immediately catch your eye from the outside but the work that went on inside on Friday 8 November was truly remarkable.

Young participants in the SnapHop 2013 Rotary Youth Arts Project (RYAP) aged 14-18 living in the City of Yarra showcased their talents after completing the 15 week program, which taught dance and photography skills and culminated in a final exhibition and performance focused around the theme 'Less is More'.

The project is an important step in the lives of these young people who have now learned important teamwork skills and gained the self confidence that seeing a creative work through to fruition can bring.

The participants are now eligible to apply for the Rotary Next Step Program, which helps young people who are socially and economically disadvantaged take the 'next step' from school into a career. The program provides mentoring, career guidance, work experience and training in communications, managing money and how to get a job, and will also provide \$500 of Educational Credits should the participant decide that tertiary education is the best path for them.

Like the youngsters who performed on Friday, alumnus Jasmine Schroeder participated in RYAP in 2007, which then lead her to take up the Next Step Program. Schroeder has since gone on to study nursing at the Australian Catholic University. While she elected not to study her original arts practice professionally, Schroeder is a walking, talking example of how creative skills can be applied to other aspects of life.

'By doing this program it has changed the way that I view things and how we need to achieve our goals and succeed in life,' she wrote.

Another previous participant, Addo Abdulahi, now a business owner, youth worker and father, struggled when he first arrived in Australia from Somalia in 2005, aged 15. He took part in the dance component of RYAP in 2007. He then participated in Next Step and was connected with a mentor who had a profound influence on his life.

'I believe I would not be where I am today if this program did not exist. This program has helped a lot of young people and I believe it will help many more in the years to

come,' he wrote. Addo is now employed as a Youth Worker in the Rotary Next Step program.

There are currently 55 young people in the program and each year about 15 new participants are inducted. Up to 15 young people graduate annually. The most recent RYAP graduates presented their work on Friday evening, and the support they received from the community was evident.

Speaking at Dancehouse, City of Yarra Mayor Jackie Fristacky emphasised the importance of the project for young people in the area; Naomi Cass, the Director of the Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP), lauded the benefits that come from creative practice.

'The RYAP enables critical engagement with the local community and welcomes young people to engage with technology, wonderful teachers, and contemporary art,' she told ArtsHub.

'Photography provides opportunity for personal expression as well as supporting future employment capital. For these young people in particular to be welcomed and engaged and supported in their development, it is an important offering.'

The photographic works displayed at Dancehouse will soon be shown during the Centre for Contemporary Photography Salon, which will be officially opened on 21 November by Victorian Minister for the Arts, Heidi Victoria.

For many of the program's participants, English is a second language. Most have had their education disrupted in some way, and may have faced a family break up, mental health issues, have refugee status or come from disadvantaged segments of the community.

This is something that Rotary's Tim Baker, who spoke on the night and who has been part of the project since 2000, acknowledges as a challenge, and is why Rotary steps in to provide a helping hand.

The City of Yarra is one of Melbourne's most diverse regions. Trendy warehouse apartments sell for upwards of \$1 million dollars just a stone's throw away from high density housing estates, home to a population of the newly arrived and the socially disadvantaged. With this mix comes some unique challenges, and this is part of what the Rotary Youth Arts and connected Next Step programs hope to address.

Students from a range of backgrounds including Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Horn of Africa countries, Serbia, Australia, Greece, Italy and from schools including but not limited to Collingwood College, NMIT, Sydney Rd Community College and Fitzroy High, took part in the 15 week program.

Dancehouse as an organisation states, 'We strongly believe that art is an irreplaceable force in our society and that art is for everybody. Art can and does change people's lives and it is our mission to generate arts experiences which subtly enhance our existence and transform our relationship to our world, to our communities and to ourselves.'

The below video includes photographic work by Abdi, Khalil, Mujtaba, Samira, Samantha, Mohammed, Gowthaman, Irshad, Lakshan, Gladlin, Yananan, Kajeepur, Vanithan and Yusuf. Dancers featured are Abdi, Khalil, Isabella, Taylor, Emily, Christina, Rebecca, Leilani, Joanna, Zoe, Eimable, Asmaa, Lumi, May, Philippa and Jasmine.

artsHub is a proud sponsor of the Next Step program through the Rotary Club of Richmond