

Many ArtReach readers will be familiar with the remarkable work of Beyond Empathy, the organisation which uses arts intervention to turn around the lives of marginalised, mostly young, people in regional communities in NSW

by RACHAEL VINCENT

WHAT IS LESS WELL KNOWN IS THAT NEARLY EVERYTHING BEYOND Empathy (BE) does is funded in some way by the corporate sector, and they have been very successful in attracting some very substantial support – in some cases, major three year commitments – from philanthropic donors.

How do they do it? And what advice do they have for other socially minded arts organisations in regional New South Wales who might be interested in doing the same thing? I met with Kim McConville, Executive Director and founder of BE, to find out.

“You’ve got to be strategic and thinking into the future,” she tells me, “and you can’t be in a hurry.” In the first instance this means ensuring that your organisation is properly set up to take advantage of potential philanthropic sources of support. Having good governance in place is essential – an independent Board, including some professional business nous, is invaluable. Securing DGR (deductible gift recipient), ITEC (income tax exempt charity) and/or PBI (public benevolent institute) status is also important, and the power of long-term strategic planning can’t be underestimated. (Kim told me she is already thinking about 2010, the first year after their current three year strategic plan for 2007–2009!)

The second, and perhaps more important, secret to getting corporate investment for your arts work (and it is ‘investment’, not ‘sponsorship’) is to put the work into building relationships with your funding partners. This takes time. The support recently received from the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation for Message

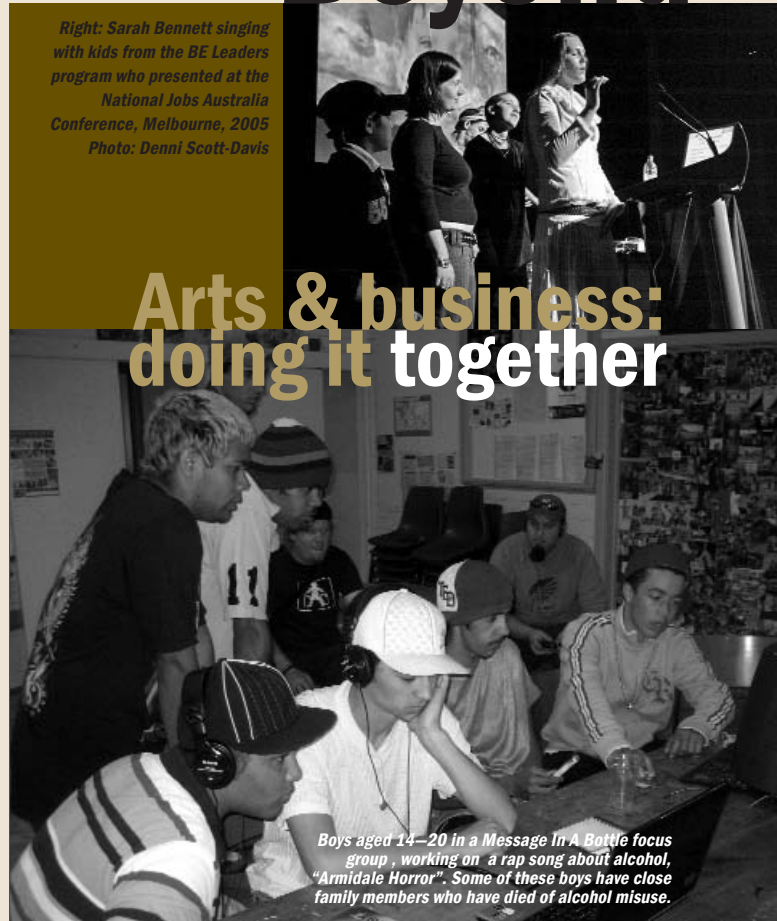
in a Bottle – a BE alcohol harm minimisation project currently underway in nine communities in the North West – was the result of 18 months dialogue between the two organisations. And it is a similar story with other BE project investors, which include: Social Ventures Australia, the AMP Foundation, Golden Sachs JBWere, the Coca-Cola Australia Foundation, the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, Caliburn Partnership, the Westpac Foundation and the Alcohol Education & Rehabilitation Foundation, as well as a couple of private individual investors and, for some projects, some Government funds. “All our investors are long term,” says Kim, who estimates she spends about 80% of her time now in relationship management with existing and potential corporate partners.

Critically, BE has been very selective in choosing funding partners whose aims matches theirs, without ‘bending’ their clearly defined mission in any way. “Research who you apply to,” says

Beyond

*Right: Sarah Bennett singing with kids from the BE Leaders program who presented at the National Jobs Australia Conference, Melbourne, 2005
Photo: Denni Scott-Davis*

Arts & business: doing it together



Boys aged 14–20 in a Message In A Bottle focus group, working on a rap song about alcohol, “Armidale Horror”. Some of these boys have close family members who have died of alcohol misuse.

December – January


17 December

 *Mr Sleep and the Flying Green Toad*
An eclectic collection of instruments and songstories written by local musicians to enchant children and adults alike.
DURRUMBUL Hall Tel 02 66 847 921

20 December

 Hay Christmas Street Festival.
Street stalls, raffles, children’s activities and live performances by local artists, and... a shopping spree giveaway. Contact **HAY** Visitor Information Centre Tel 02 6993 4045

26 December

 Led by a cast of established Australian entertainers, **WAUCHOPE’s** *The Seventy’s Show* is a trip back to a time when life was free and easy
Tel 0428 411 628

26 December – 1 January

 The 62nd Australian Jazz Convention The longest continuous running musical celebration of its kind. Contact **GOULBURN** Visitor Information Centre Tel 1800 353 646

Kim. “Don’t scattergun. It’s better to choose five or six people your values are aligned with and stay with them over the long term.... When you’re struggling for money it’s easy to be tempted [to compromise] but in some instances, you just have to say no.” Gaining the corporate dollar is not about making concessions in your values or your vision. “Stand by your values – never let them go,” says Kim. “The corporate sector wants to invest in people who are strong about their values.”

Being clear about what you do and don’t do, and honest about what you can and can’t do is axiomatic. “The trick is to never promise more than you can deliver,” says Kim. But you do have to deliver! Managing corporate support can bring with it a new raft of reporting responsibilities. Just as applications for funding need to be very well thought out and carefully prepared, with specific requests attached to specific outcomes, “you need a really strong evidence base to provide the numbers and prove you’re getting

sponsorship

the outcomes,” says Kim. “We’ve never been asked to fly anyone’s flag or put up signage, just for vigorous responsibility and accountability.” Tools like Social Ventures Australia’s ‘TripleP’ (Planning, Programming and Performance) – a methodology to clarify purpose and strategy, set measurable targets and evaluate performance against the plan – have been “really helpful” with this.

But the most remarkable thing of all about Kim’s work in gaining philanthropic support for BE is the transformation in attitudes and the learning that has taken place as a result of the relationships that Kim has developed with the people at BE’s corporate funding partners. Kim describes the fundamental change of attitude she’s experienced:

“In the beginning I was sceptical and, in part, cynical about the corporations – I mean, they’re out to make money – but you’re dealing with individuals and people just like you – real people who want to make a difference and who just happen to work in the corporate sector. They want exactly the same changes that we want and have services to offer. We offer a way to reconnect to community. There’s an enormous, generous desire of individuals to want to make a difference and we’ve got a great way in which people can do that.”

Gaining philanthropic support for your work means developing truly reciprocal, two-way relationships, with each party bringing



Clockwise from left: Arramayah and Miranda Makepeace with her individual project in Armidale for Message in a Bottle; Visual arts and hip hop program, Message in a Bottle project, Nambucca, August 2006. Young mothers, Sally and Charlene, learning the lyrics of a song they’ve just written in Gamilaroi language as part of the Lullabies & Lingo project in Boggabilla. October 2006. Photos: Denni Scott-Davis



their own set of skills, mentoring, expertise and understanding to the table. It’s something that you do together: both parties have to listen to each other, be flexible and share. Says Kim, “You’ve got to trust. You can be sceptical ... or you can trust.” Says Coca-Cola Amatil Australia’s Director of Corporate Affairs, Alec Wagstaff, “The thing with Kim is she’s very open to debate and advice – and I have had experience with people in the arts world who aren’t, in the past. Having said that, she’s very passionate about what she does. Sometimes people can be very passionate about what they do and that closes their mind but Kim can find a balance between that passion and looking at the different way of doing things.”

The result? “I’ve grown as a human being ... and we’ve grown as an organisation,” says Kim, and “I feel ... exceptionally humble, very privileged, that people would make this investment. I want to honour those relationships, because people have stepped up and said, ‘We believe in you and we’re going to support you.’”

“There’s an enormous amount of support out there to do this,” Kim says, “and anybody can do it; it’s not difficult. All you’ve got to do is put up your hand.” ■

More about Beyond Empathy at www.beyondempathy.org.au. More about corporate support for the arts in our articles from Artsupport Australia and AbaF on pages 14 and 15.

January

31 December – 3 January

 **GULGONG Folk Festival**
Concerts, bush dance, poetry, yarn spinning, jam sessions, story telling, a street parade, workshops, children’s activities
Tel 02 6374 1700

31 December – 31 January

 **The Manning River Summer Festival**
Over 40 exhibitions, performances and musical events in the month-long program.
TAREE Tel 02 6551 2390

5 – 28 January

 **Warm Fuzzies**, a solo exhibition of fur fabric Australian animal quilts by Anne Neal. Also includes a selected retrospective of Anne’s 35 years of quilting. Coo-ee Heritage Centre **GILGANDRA**
Tel 02 6847 2045

12 – 14 January

 **THREDBO Blues Festival** - A spectacular setting to enjoy a range of over 100 Australian Blues acts, with Roadhouse, Chicago, R&B, Soul, Funk and Delta Blues.
Tel 02 6457 6882