

YOUTH IN REMOTE AREAS OF AUSTRALIA ARE HAVING THEIR VOICES heard through the distinct music style and culture of hip-hop thanks to a new phenomenon in community arts work.

The terms hip-hop, beat boxing and break dancing are no longer just associated with urban landscapes. Young people in Australian regional communities are now being introduced to a new force for community involvement and empowerment: Desert Pea Media.

Traveling as far as Boggabilla and Broken Hill to achieve their aims, Desert Pea Media's Toby Finlayson, Sean Spencer and Matthew Priestley conduct 'Outreach Workshop Programs'. These are designed to encourage young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to express themselves creatively

desertpea

giving disadvantaged kids something to sing about



by SUSANNA DUNKERLEY,
CARLA ROCAVERT & KATE WILLIAMSON

and develop their own forms of popular media with an intention to build a more diverse and capable generation for the future.

"It's about bringing communities together," says principal artist, Matthew Priestley. "We're trying to leave as many tools in the community as possible to train young people to start their own programs and projects in the arts and community development."

And this has been seen in the work at the NSW-Qld border town of Boggabilla, where young men's groups have been set up and

are in turn mentoring younger men. They have been setting up their own projects and will be the first in many of the Desert Pea Media mentoring pods. These will be sustainable centres where media training and mentoring are undertaken.

Relating to the kids through their image, the boys from Desert Pea aren't your typical kind of youth workers. They dress in the modern rapper's 'get up' and talk the talk of young people, whilst delivering important messages about social awareness and community issues. Perceived as equals, not 'old fogies' looking down on the kids, the Desert Pea workers are well-received by their young and diverse audiences.

"We try to get these kids to think outside the box of their day-to-day routines and get them thinking about the issues that are holding them back from achieving something positive for themselves and their community," says Sean Spencer, Co-Director of Desert Pea Media.

Desert Pea's most recent venture was a series of workshops conducted with young people, aged between 5 and 25, in the isolated Aboriginal community of Palm Island (Queensland). Sean, Matthew and Toby worked with local people to create a stirring film piece around indigenous issues.

Hannah Semler, Managing Director of Arts Out West believes that exposure to alternative arts, culture and popular media is the key in reversing the cycle of substance abuse and crime amongst young people in community.

"So much depends on human relationships," she says. "Opportunity is proportional to population and the infrastructure of facilities and expertise. What's needed is training for youth and social workers to carry out creative projects. Desert Pea facilitate this. They're a strong example of capacity building for young people and their communities through the arts."

With more funding, Desert Pea Media looks for sustainable outcomes for its objectives of creating media based work opportunities for marginalised communities. Desert Pea Media knows that this is an achievable goal and is a much needed resource for rural communities in NSW. ■

**CONTACT Sean Spencer, Desert Pea Media Tel 0434 360 042
Website www.desertpeamedia.com.au**

Susanna Dunkerley, Carla Rocavert and Kate Williamson are recent graduates of the CSU Bathurst's communications degree courses.

Renell Link teaches a group of Boggabilla primary school kids how to write a hip-hop song during Desert Pea Media's 2006 'Stylin Out' mentoring program .

May – June

31 May – 2 June

 Melbourne Comedy Festival Roadshow 07 Returning with a new line-up of Australian and overseas acts. \$33/\$28 IPAC, **WOLLONGONG** Tel 02 4226 3366 Website www.ipac.org.au

5 June

 Undertake Marketing One day Creative Volunteering – No Limits! workshop **FORSTER** Tel 02 6658 9400 Website www.regionalartsnsw.com.au (Go to 'Projects')

7 – 11 June

 Port Stephens Country Music Festival Country music cruises, bush poets, Boot Scooting, and other events. Across **PORT STEPHENS** Website www.portstephens.org.au/events.asp

8 June – 22 July

 Cuisine & Country Gastronomic images in Australian art. Lake Macquarie City Gallery, **BOORAGUL** Tel 02 4965 8260 Website www.lakemac.com.au