

Small Resources BIG IMPACT – The Lismore Lantern Parade

by JYLLIE JACKSON

The Lismore Lantern Parade is a one day festival celebrating the Winter Solstice & the community reclaiming the streets by lighting up the heart of the city with the gentle glow of candlelit lanterns. It has consisted of lantern, performance and prop making workshops, a parade and a fiery finale with fireworks by or on the Wilson's River. This year we introduced the Inaugural Winter Lantern Craft Market, which was very successful. Like the event itself the lanterns have been growing in size, complexity and innovation. In June 2001 over 7,000 people took to the streets of Lismore on the longest, coldest night of the year, glowing and joyful.

The first Lantern parade in 1994 was held in response to community fears about antisocial behaviour in the CBD, it was seen as a way to bring people into the erstwhile deserted city centre in a safe and celebratory way. We made and sold about 100 small dodecahedron and star shaped lanterns. A large sun lantern that was floated on the river and became a centrepiece for the final bonfire. About 300 people joined the parade, which was harangued and booed by a group of fundamentalist Christians who thought it was a pagan festival! However, by 1998 the Lanterns were being used for a Christian Fellowship pageant, Christmas Carols and numerous Christian festivals and events since - many bridges crossed, many friendships made. The parade also served as a promotion for the highly successful Lismore Folk Festival. The lantern makers and 'fieries' honed their skills in the finale fire events at this festival, until it came to an end in 1999. Many of the artists involved in the Lismore Lantern Parade and Fire Events have a strong history with the work of Neil Cameron and Faridah Whyte-Cameron, working with them on numerous large scale events. Directed by Jyllie Jackson since 1996, Lismore lanterns are proud to carry on, teach and develop the tradition of outdoor celebration and ritual.

The event is free, making it accessible to all members of the community. Over the years the lantern parades have received little in the way of formal funding, in fact over 7 years they have received a total of \$7,000 from Local Government and the Chamber of Commerce, and \$500 from the State Government. Hard cash has come from running public and school workshops, at \$5 a lantern, we have made over 4,000 little lanterns in these workshops. The lantern makers also run a great sweatshop to make 100s of lanterns to sell on the night, and a few generous members of the community have given donations. This year we took a bucket around the crowd and asked for donations, just one bucket delivered \$800, definitely a goer for next year!

We have developed incredible begging skills, and the community has responded fantastically, in kind support in 2001 amounted to \$30,000 in value. This included media promotion, staging, cranes to lift props, hire of equipment, food for volunteers and lots more. Some local businesses were giving us huge discounts without even being asked. Such is the power of an event that touches the hearts of the community, and the lantern parade certainly seems to do that.

In 2001 we created a new fundraising project "community partnerships", organisations and local businesses sponsored community groups, and large lantern 'Dream Boats', the theme for 2001. We made them, they decorated them and carried them in the parade. This successful involvement will continue into the 2002 festival within a new theme.

The Lismore Lantern Makers sponsored a Work for the Dole project this year, known as Light 'n Up, the project has been a huge success. The core group turned out to be 6 young men, some of whom had a history with the criminal justice system and absolutely no history of art or 'creativity', unless you count vast tracts of body art and graffiti. Not only has Light 'n Up created a team of enthusiastic workers, but has been of great assistance financially, and is directly linked to our original intent.

The Lismore Lantern Parade has grown to be the most popular community cultural event in the region. The parade won the 2001 Regional Tourism Award for Business Excellence in the Festivals and Special Events Category, and the lanterns are invited to participate in dozens of local and regional events. The Lismore Lantern Parade will expand in future years to include other events such as a ball, art exhibitions, a bigger market and concerts. In 2002 we will explore themes of shadow, fusing the visual and performing arts, presenting the delights of the grotesque and the beautiful in the vibrancy of Carnivale, circus, flame and shadow theatre, creating – "Shadows to Dance In". ■