

Case Study 3

Taking accessibility online

Propel Youth Arts WA in partnership with the Swan Friendship Club of Western Australia and Junkadelic.

The original project planned by Propel Youth Arts WA for the **DAII Pilot** project was to enable people with disabilities to access and experience positive connections to arts and cultural activities through holding inclusive workshops and performances in conjunction with National Youth Week.

Due to a change in the organisation's strategic direction, the redesigned project saw a membership push for the organisation and a wider awareness of making projects and workshops inclusive and accessible for all young people.

Project Coordinator Susannah Day joined Propel Youth Arts WA in January 2008, during the 'Create' stage of the **DAII Pilot** Project.

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Propel Youth Arts WA recognised that while they aimed to represent all young people with an interest in the arts, very few of their membership base were people with disabilities. This process of evaluation identified the need for improvement in Propel's key communication methods; website and fortnightly e-zine, to ensure that all young people with a disability can access, engage and participate in the arts.

The approach

The Propel Youth Arts DAII project was developed with a two-stage approach. This involved redesigning their website and reassessing their membership strategies, followed by an inclusive workshop series in partnership with Swan Friendship Club and Junkadelic.

"The first stage was a marketing and membership strategy rewrite. We are a membership organisation that supports and advocates for young artists and we're supposed to be doing that for all young artists, whether they are with or without a disability; everyone across the board," says Ms Day.

“We try to be as inclusive as possible but for the DAII Project we re-evaluated and found that we weren't, and that our membership and our marketing weren't as inclusive as they could be.

"Therefore young artists with disabilities weren't engaging with our services. Propel staff members went through some training to understand what constituted accessible and inclusive marketing. This included training in design, project management and events coordination.

"A majority of all of our marketing is through an online website and we realised that a lot of the time it wasn't accessible to young people with disabilities, so we needed to do something about that. So the first thing we did was get our old website audited. It was then that we recognised what we were doing wrong; things like the font wasn't big enough and there wasn't information about accessibility for venues, things like that."

The reconstructed website, audited by The Association for the Blind, included such enhancements as having everything in a larger font, colour coded sections, streamlined menus and options, larger points to click for easier navigation through the site and further accessibility information on each event.

“Because we have other arts organisations’ information on our website, it has prompted other organisations to think about accessibility and companion cards and what they can do about the accessibility and inclusiveness of their events. Our aim is to be the first stop for all young people wanting arts information,” Ms Day said.

To accompany the website redesign, Propel Youth Arts’ Communication and Marketing Officer wrote the organisation’s first Accessibility and Inclusion Strategy. The document outlined many practical measures to be implemented by the organisation in 2010.

The partnerships

The second phase of the project involved connecting with the Swan Friendship

Club in Midland to create inclusive music workshops.

“We partnered with Swan Friendship Club, a non-profit club based in Midland,” Ms Day says. “The Club came about because parents of children with intellectual disabilities saw that there was a major need for their children to have friendships outside of school. Once they got out of that structured school environment they were losing those friendships and were becoming lonely and were not being engaged in the community.

“A lot of disability services are respite services created to give parents a break. It was explained to me that they were putting kids on a bus from four to 25 years of age and taking them to a movie or bowling. There was no independence or self-autonomy for the young people with disabilities.



Photographer Janusz Strzelecki

“Given that we are an advocacy organisation and not a producing body we didn’t have the skills to facilitate these workshops so we engaged Junkadelic, a recycling music junk band who had worked with Swan Friendship Club previously. We thought it was perfect since they’re an inclusive organisation that understands how to work with people with disabilities,” says Ms Day.

Although Junkadelic had worked with Swan Friendship Club before, further training was facilitated to train the group about more severe intellectual disabilities so they would be prepared for the workshops. The project enabled Propel Youth Arts WA to better understand how to work with young artists across the board.

“We’ve only been around since 2003 so we’re really quite young and I think this

was a great chance for us to evaluate our strategic direction in terms of how we are going to engage with young people with disabilities in the future. I don’t think we had engaged much in the Swan districts or the northern suburbs before either. So this project gave us a wonderful chance to engage with two new communities.

“What we were initially trying to do was write the marketing strategy first in order to attract young people to these workshops. But in the end they ran concurrently.”

The workshops with Junkadelic revolved around making instruments from recycled materials and devising two pieces for performance through improvisation.

“We were hoping that young people from the City of Swan area without disabilities would be included in the workshop series



Photographer Janusz Strzelecki



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and the desired outcome was that an inclusive performance would be created by people with and without disabilities. But the young people without disabilities who we got to come to the workshops didn't stay.

"I think it was really challenging," Ms Day says. "There's a large difference between young people with severe intellectual disabilities and physical difficulties. The young people with intellectual disabilities far outweighed the people without. My feeling, from what I've been told, was that there was a sense of inversion of the minority, so it was really confronting for young people without disability."

The performance

The performance was intended to be a part of the City of Swan's Hyper Festival. When the City revised their strategic planning and decided not to hold the festival in 2009, the performance was moved and included in the 2009 Channel 7 Christmas Pageant.

"The outcome of the workshops is that they created a roaming parade performance and a theatre style performance. So they

did the parade performance as part of the pageant."

The participants in the workshops enjoyed their experience, continuing the workshops with Junkadelic with the assistance of another grant, which Propel Youth Arts WA helped establish with Healthway's Be Active message.

"The participants loved it and the reason we chose them to be the core participants of our DAII Project was because they had worked with Junkadelic before and had created a great relationship with the facilitators. The Swan Friendship Club wanted to continue to employ Junkadelic, but just didn't have the funds, so we were able to come through. Ours was a pilot project in terms of Propel Youth Arts WA's partnership with Junkadelic and Swan Friendship Club," says Ms Day.

The benefits

The success of the project has been due to unexpected benefits more than planned activities.

"I think that it was successful in a way. I think the inclusiveness in terms of the

workshops and the physical outcome wasn't successful, but I think that's great for us to acknowledge and recognise that we didn't do it in the best way we could. It made us realise that we don't always create inclusive events.

“I think the training we've gone through as an organisation, and particularly myself as the Project Coordinator, has been fantastic in making sure everything we do is inclusive. I think we'll now go away and think about what we can do to make everything more inclusive, every single project and every piece of information and marketing, to ensure that young people with disabilities do have the opportunity to engage,” reflects Ms Day.

“It also means that one person with a disability doesn't have the same needs as another person with a disability and we don't want to assume that all young people with disabilities have the same needs.”

The changes to the website and membership formats have had more obvious instant success, despite being ongoing.

The links with the Swan Friendship Club and Junkadelic have produced some strong partnerships. Propel Youth Arts WA has continued to work with the Swan Friendship Club beyond the DAII project. Propel Youth Arts WA will continue to support them to deliver arts workshops to young people and they hope that the DAII project will have long lasting benefits to the Swan Friendship Club members and the wider youth arts community.

Outline of project

To ensure young people with disabilities, their families and carers are able to access and participate in arts and cultural services. The project was in two stages. The first stage involved updating the website and accessibility strategy. The second was to hold workshops that would result in a public performance.

Partners

Propel Youth Arts WA is a membership-based, not-for-profit organisation that provides a range of programs and services across art forms that connect, support and promote young artists.

Swan Friendship Club of Western Australia Inc endeavours to enhance the well-being and quality of life of young people with disabilities through recreational activities.

Outcomes

As a result of the workshops, a theatre and percussive parade by the Frog Rockin' Band was performed as part of the Channel 7 Christmas Pageant in December 2009, with ongoing potential. Propel Youth Arts WA also created a new website to enable increased accessibility to their services.